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FREE inside - Catholic TIMES

There's nothing more essential than my faith

Archbishop Gallagher warns freedom of worship is being eroded as nations respond to challenges of Covid-19 crisis

Nick Benson
England's most senior Vatican official has told the United Nations that the ability to practise one's faith and receive spiritual guidance are "the highest of essential services".
Archbishop Paul Gallagher, the Holy See's Secretary for Relations with States, warned that amid the global response to the Covid-19 pandemic, it was evident that a "robust understanding of religious freedom is being eroded".
The Liverpool-born archbishop told the UN Human Rights Council session in Geneva that "There are numerous examples of how the freedom of worship can be guaranteed while taking all the necessary precautions to protect reasonably public safety."
He pointed out how Pope Francis, the Vatican and most bishops around the world acknowledged and accepted most measures imposed by local and national governments to ensure public health and slow the spread of the pandemic. However, some measures have gone so far as to "impinge on the free exercise of human rights."
Last year, churches throughout the UK and Ireland were ordered to close as countries entered their first lockdowns at the end of March. Initially

the majority of Church leaders and members of the faithful recognised the measures as a means to prevent the spread of a dangerous, fatal virus and embraced technology as a means to participate in live-streamed Masses.
However, as restrictions began to ease, many leaders and believers voiced their concern and anger at 'essential' and 'non-essential' shops and services being given the go-ahead to open with restrictions in place, while places of worship were largely ignored.
Churches have since reopened across the UK and Northern Ireland. However, in Scotland and Ireland they have once again been closed, with many questioning these decisions.
In the past week, Scottish bishops have criticised First Minister Nicola Sturgeon over a planned blanket cap on 20 parishioners per church regardless of size once they re-open, while Irish bishops have urged Taoiseach Micheál Martin to allow the resumption of public worship in time for Holy Week and Easter.
During his address to the UN Human Rights Council session, Archbishop Gallagher noted that any limitations on the exercise of human

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Archbishop Paul Gallagher, Vatican foreign minister, addresses the UN.
Photo: Cia Pak, UN

World has abandoned Yemen – UN

Human rights groups and charities have reacted with dismay after the UK Government joined other nations in slashing its financial aid for the embattled state of Yemen, blaming the pandemic.
The UK's support package will be £87m this year, down from £164m pledged last year.
Aid officials have condemned the cut, while the UN director general, António Guterres, said moves to reduce aid to the country amounted to a "death sentence" for its people.
The UN has described the situation in Yemen as the world's worst humanitarian crisis, fuelled by a seven-year long civil war between rebels backed by Iran and followers of the former President Abdrabbuh Mansour Hadi, supported by a Saudi-led coalition of Arab states.
An estimated 20 million people – two-thirds of the Yemeni population – depend on humanitarian assistance, and some two million children are reported to be acutely malnourished.
The conflict has seen the total collapse of the country's health system, leaving it unable to cope with a growing tide of Covid-19 cases as well as victims of the fighting.
The cut in the UK's contribution was announced by Minister of State James Cleverly. He blamed "recent global challenges" which had left "a difficult financial context for us all".
The UK is not alone to be accused of abandoning Yemen: a donor aid conference set up by the UN this week, which hoped to raise nearly \$4bn in aid for the country, raised little more than half that, with one observer saying it felt like "the world has turned its back on Yemen."
David Beasley, executive director of UN's World Food Programme, told the conference: "We've got famine knocking on the door," with Mr Guterres adding that only donations had averted a famine in 2018, but that "today, reducing aid is a death sentence".

Church capacity rule challenged
Scotland's Catholic bishops have called on the country's Government to drop a proposed 20-person limit on congregations when churches can reopen for worship, saying the number is arbitrary and makes no sense in light of the size of some church buildings. Full story, see pg 2

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Edward Chilvers on following nature not convention

Scotland happy to welcome pope amid rumours of COP visit

Nick Benson

The Catholic bishops of Scotland have “warmly welcomed” a potential papal visit later this year amid speculation that the Holy Father is ‘considering’ paying a visit to coincide with the COP26 climate conference in Glasgow.

“While the decision on whether or not the pope attends the UN Climate Summit in Glasgow will be a matter entirely for the Holy See, Scotland’s

Catholic bishops would warmly welcome his presence, however briefly, in this country,” a spokesperson for the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Scotland told *The Catholic Universe*.

Speculation surrounding Pope Francis scheduling a trip to the country began after *The Times* reported that the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Scotland had been told to prepare for the possibility of such a visit.

The newspaper said it ‘understands that the pope is considering making his first visit to Scotland for the crucial environmental meeting in November, with discussions taking place ‘at the highest level’.

It pointed out that the Holy Father’s political visits, including his addresses to the European parliament in Strasbourg, tend to be quick one-day trips and noted that a visit to Glasgow

would more than likely see him confined to the COP26 summit.

Pope Francis has been very outspoken on climate change. In his encyclical on ecology, *Laudato Si’*, he stressed that climate change is real and ‘mainly a result of human activity’.

The UK’s ambassador to the Holy See, Sally Axworthy, (pictured above)



told *The Times*: “Everyone who is a member of the UN framework convention on climate change can attend and that includes the Holy See, which has observer status.”

“It is perfectly possible that the Vatican will attend but it is up to the Holy See to decide the level of representation.”



Churchgoers wear facemasks and socially distance during Mass.

Government plans to limit congregations must be axed

Nick Benson

Scotland’s Catholic bishops have called for a planned 20-person limit on congregations when churches can reopen for worship to be dropped.

Instead, the bishops maintain congregation size should be calculated in accordance with the size of each church, a system similar to that used in the retail sector, which still maintains social distancing regulations.

First Minister Nicola Sturgeon said that her road map out of lockdown included plans to reopen public worship over the Easter weekend, but with services limiting congregations to just 20 – regardless of the size of the church.

Stay-at-home restrictions would be eased on Easter Monday, 5th April, but Easter and Passover would be taken into account during the decision-making process.

While welcoming the return of public worship, the bishops said they would speak with the Scottish Government regarding the limit on numbers. “The Catholic Community recognises the seriousness of the pandemic and is committed to working with others to avoid the spreading of infection,” they said.

“At the same time, we anticipate ongoing dialogue with the Scottish Government regarding the requirement of a numerical ‘cap’ on the number of worshippers.

“As we continue to observe social distancing and the protocols formulated by the Bishops’ Conference working group under the leadership of the former Chief Medical Officer Sir Harry Burns, it would be more appropriate for each church building to accommodate a congregation in proportion to its size rather than on the basis of an imposed number.”

Echoing the “timely words” of Pope Francis’ address to the representatives of countries to the Holy See on the 8th February 2021, they added: “Even as we seek ways to protect human lives from the spread of the virus, we cannot view the spiritual and moral dimension of the human person as less important than physical health.

“The opening of churches is a sign that the sacrifices endured so far are bearing fruit and gives us hope and encouragement to persevere.

“We pray that the Risen Christ, for whom we long during this holy season of Lent, will bless and bring healing to our nation.”

Nothing more essential than my faith

Continued from page 1

rights for the protection of public health “must stem from a situation of strict necessity”.

“Such limitations must be proportional to the situation, applied in a non-discriminatory fashion and used only when no other means are available,” he said.

However, he pointed out that in some regions and nations, those criteria were not met when it came to religious gatherings. And, while agreements to respect religious freedom while protecting public health were possible, some government officials

never thought to contact and work with religious leaders.

In fact, he said, in the global response to the Covid-19 pandemic, one can see that a “robust understanding of religious freedom is being eroded”.

“By ignoring the religious dimension of the human person, or worse, by dismissing it as non-essential, this fundamental right is being reduced gradually to a form of personal and private freedom of thought or opinion rather than respected as an integral part of what it means to be human,” Archbishop Gallagher said.

“The Holy See would like to stress that, as is recognised in numerous human rights instruments, the freedom of religion also protects its public witness and expression – both individually and collectively, publicly and privately – in forms of worship, observance and teaching,” he told the UN council.

But rather than doing their utmost to protect religious freedom, he said, too many local and regional governments moved to apply “even stricter limitations to places of worship or religious education than they do for many other activities and services”.



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Cardinal in call for prayers as Pope makes historic Iraq visit

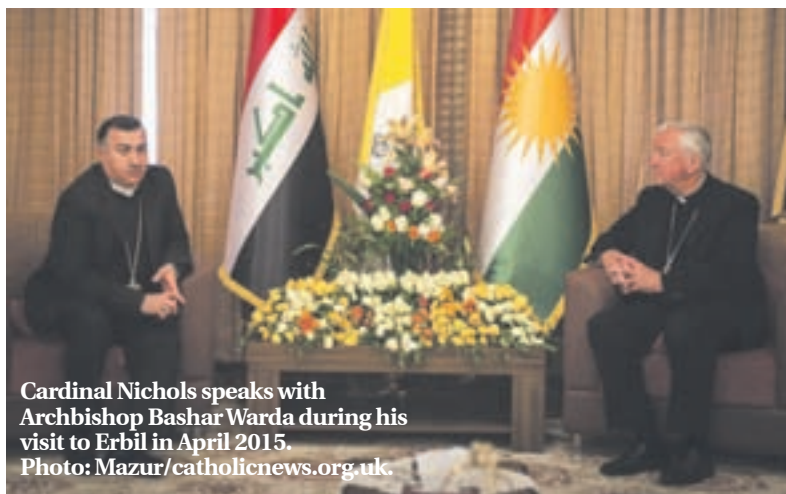
Nick Benson

As Pope Francis makes his historic visit to Iraq, Cardinal Vincent Nichols has urged Catholics to pray for him.

Acknowledging the physical demands the Holy Father faces this weekend as a true sign of his commitment to Iraq, he said the pope will also experience many emotional ones.

Citing the historical resonance, rootedness of Christian faith in the land and the trauma so many people there have been through, Cardinal Nichols said: "These things will make really deep emotional and spiritual demands on Pope Francis and that's why it's important that we support him with our prayers and with out spiritual endeavour for him in these crucial days."

His call came via a Catholic News podcast by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England & Wales (CBEW), in which he recalled his own visit to Erbil in the north of Iraq in April 2015, less than a year after Daesh terrorised the region, taking Iraq's second city



Cardinal Nichols speaks with Archbishop Bashar Warda during his visit to Erbil in April 2015. Photo: Mazur/catholicnews.org.uk.

Mosul and killing and displacing thousands.

He recalled the level of security in place, including travelling in an armour-plated vehicle, as well as his chat with the Archbishop of Erbil, Bashar Warda.

"Archbishop Warda woke up one morning and there were over 100,000 refugees knocking on his door. And what did he do? He opened churches. He opened every bit of property they had and said, 'come and sleep here'. 'He established refugee hostels and

camps in all sorts of places. I remember the frame of a building that was not yet developed – just floors and pillars, an open skeleton. And they started putting Portakabins into this concrete framework so the people had somewhere to live."

The cardinal recalled the hospitality offered by the people in the camps and the "raw courage" of others, including "a tiny old lady, probably in her 80s" who reprimanded a Daesh fighter. She told the cardinal how she had called the fighter a "disgrace" after he stopped a group she was in at the border with Kurdistan and took their jewellery. The fighter then backed off and let them through.

The cardinal said the pope's visit to Najaf to meet with Grand Ayatollah Sayyid Ali Al-Husaymi Al-Sistani will be a significant moment of the trip.

"That is crucially important, because here you have the spiritual leader of not just Shia Islam in Iraq, but in a whole swathe of the Middle East," he said. "He is revered and his responses are formative. He will welcome the Holy Father and what they say together and the signals that will give will be hugely important for the Christians, particularly the Catholic people in Iraq."

Faith made the scapegoat for virus outbreaks

Faith communities around the world have been unfairly blamed for Covid-19 outbreaks, a UK parliamentary group has warned.

The All-Party Parliamentary Group for International Freedom of Religion or Belief (APPG ForB) said some groups had been targets of conspiracy theories and hate speech.

The findings come as part of the APPG's 2021 Commentary on the Current State of International Freedom of Religion or Belief.

Recalling the UN Secretary General's observation that there has been a "tsunami of hate and xenophobia", the report highlights how religion and belief communities have been blamed for the virus; made scapegoats for the outbreaks; and castigated as irresponsible 'super-spreaders'.

'Many of these attacks are little more than self-serving attempts to deflect attention from the failure of the authorities,' the APPG states.

It also warns that the pandemic has provided 'a backdrop to a further deepening of the repression and suppression' of faith. Some states 'have taken the opportunities presented by the eyes of the international community being elsewhere to return to their oppressive practices'.

Many marginalised faith groups have faced intensified discrimination since the pandemic began.

MPs look to 'sugar tax' to fund plan to broaden free school breakfasts

Nick Benson

A cross-party group of politicians has urged the Government to extend school breakfast provision to ensure that no child is too hungry to learn.

The call comes as the School Breakfast Bill, tabled by Catholic MP Emma Lewell-Buck, has been postponed due to the reduced parliamentary calendar as a result of Covid-19. If successful,

it would have created a commitment to a comprehensive programme of school breakfast clubs across the country, ensuring every child could start the day with a healthy breakfast.

Ms Lewell-Buck, Labour MP for South Shields, has co-ordinated a cross party letter with Robert Halfon, Conservative MP for Harlow, gathering almost 100 signatures across both

Houses in support of the Bill.

In the letter, addressed to the Minister for Children and Families Vicky Ford, the politicians call for her to 'scale up funding for school breakfasts to all disadvantaged schools in England and to provide this funding long term, in line with the proposal set out by the School Breakfast Bill'.

They point out that school breakfasts tackle classroom hunger and improve children's energy, behaviour and concentration, leading to improved academic attainment, which enables children to leave school ready to secure highly paid work, contributing to economic growth.

The politicians praise the Government's National School Breakfast Programme for providing over 280,000 disadvantaged children with breakfasts but raise concern that it only reaches seven per cent of schools.

They suggest the money for the programme be raised through the Soft Drinks Industry Levy, which raises approximately £340m each year. More than £700m raised from the Levy since 2018 is unaccounted for.



Learning disability adults move up vaccine order

The Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) has advised the Government to invite all people on the GP Learning Disability Register for Covid-19 vaccination.

The advice of the JCVI remains that adults with severe and profound learning disabilities, and those with learning disabilities in long-stay nursing and residential care settings, should be offered the vaccine in priority group six, while people with Down's syn-

drome are included in group four. Adults with less severe learning disabilities are not currently prioritised.

However, to ensure those most at risk of death or hospitalisation are prioritised for vaccination, the JCVI has supported plans to invite anyone on the GP Learning Disability Register – as well as adults with other related conditions, including cerebral palsy – for vaccination as part of priority group six.

Jackie O'Sullivan, of learning disability charity Mencap, said: "It's now crucially important that everyone with a learning disability checks that they are on the register and asks to go on it if they are not. Being on the register has many benefits and entitles people to annual health checks and prioritisation for future vaccinations, as well as allowing them to get the Covid vaccine and be confident they are protected."

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Top judge to lead victim payments

A senior judge has been appointed president of the Victims' Payment Board, which will determine who is entitled to payments under the new Troubles pension scheme.

Mr Justice Gerry McAlinden was appointed as interim president of the board last November to assist the Department of Justice with the development of the Troubles Permanent Disablement Payment Scheme, but has now taken on the role permanently.

"I am honoured to be appointed by the Lord Chief Justice as president of the Victims' Payments Board," said Mr Justice McAlinden.

Mr Justice McAlinden:
'Victims and their families need to trust the board'



His work has begun with "constructive meetings with representatives from the main groups supporting the victims of the Troubles," he said. "I hope these form the start of positive working relationships enabling victims to trust the board."

"The many victims deserve the recognition and payments to which they are entitled," said Mr Justice McAlinden.

"The recent Court of Appeal decision made it clear that the Executive Office is under a legal duty to make these payments and I would encourage all to work together to ensure the full implementation of the scheme which the legislation envisages."

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Irish archbishops press for Easter return to worship

Nick Benson

Catholic archbishops in Ireland have urged Taoiseach Micheál Martin to allow a swift resumption of public worship, to allow the faithful to gather for Holy Week and Easter services.

At a recent bilateral meeting between the Taoiseach and the archbishops to discuss the current level of Covid-19 restrictions, the Catholic leaders expressed their desire to return to worship, particularly during the season of Lent and with the approach of Holy Week and Easter.

The meeting was attended by the Primate of All-Ireland and Archbishop of Armagh, Eamon Martin; the Archbishop of Dublin, Dermot Farrell; the Archbishop of Cashel and Emlly, Kieran O'Reilly; and the Archbishop of Tuam, Michael Neary.

The meeting was part of ongoing dialogue over the Covid-19 pandemic and restrictions on public worship.

Recognising the huge challenges the pandemic poses, the archbishops emphasised that they wish to continue supporting the public health message and to encourage all necessary measures, including vaccination, to protect health and well-being, especially that of the most vulnerable.

But they pointed out that life is particularly stressful and difficult for many people at present to endure, and that the Government needs to do more to recognise the spiritual comfort and hope that participation in public worship brings.

They expressed "a strong desire" that people might gather safely this year for the important ceremonies of



A woman participating in a Rosary rally carries a sign near a statue of Mary outside the cathedral in Galway, Ireland. She was seeking the return of public Mass during the Covid-19 pandemic. Photo: Clodagh Kilcoyne, Reuters.

Holy Week and Easter, and requested an increase in the number of the bereaved who may attend funerals.

The Taoiseach acknowledged the importance of the Church community in people's lives, especially at this time of stress and worry.

He outlined the ongoing concerns regarding the spread of the virus, particularly the new variants, stressing that any increase at all in mobility can have serious consequences for public health and put pressure on the

health service.

In concluding, he said the concerns raised at the meeting would be given consideration. Dialogue will continue as the situation evolves.

However, the Association of Catholic Priests expressed concern about calls for an Easter return to community worship, noting that ACP members have "significant misgivings" about re-opening churches for Easter ceremonies, believing it to be a "premature and potentially detrimental move".

"The post-Christmas surge in Covid-19 cases and the threat from new variants represent persuasive evidence against an early return to congregational worship," the ACP said.

However, it added that "hearts are lifted with the roll-out of the vaccination programme".

"Faith, science, solidarity and empathy will serve us all well in our attempts to overcome this pandemic. Meanwhile, we continue to worship 'in spirit and in truth'."

Church calls for priests to have the jab

Nick Benson

Ireland's Catholic bishops have given their support to Covid-19 vaccination programmes throughout the Republic and Northern Ireland.

But they have called for more vaccines to be made available to carers as a matter of priority, and for priests who are chaplains to nursing care facilities and who preside at funerals.

In a statement, the bishops noted

that the development and provision of vaccines are "already providing reassurance for those who are most vulnerable to the virus and will help us to return to normality in terms of work, education, religious practice, and sporting and leisure activities as soon as possible".

They noted that many people have already received the vaccine and particularly welcomed the fact that all

residents and staff of nursing care facilities have been vaccinated at this stage.

"At present the group prioritised in the Republic of Ireland to receive the vaccine in the coming weeks are those over 70 years of age while in Northern Ireland it is those over 65 years of age along with others who are clinically vulnerable," they said.

"We encourage all parishes and Church personnel to promote this programme and to encourage elderly parishioners, relatives and neighbours to avail of the opportunity to protect their health and the health of the whole community."

Last December, the Irish Catholic bishops in a statement said that "safe and effective vaccination is an essential aspect of the prevention of disease".

They encouraged Catholics to support the programme of vaccination "not only for their own good, but for the protection of life and the health of those who are vulnerable and for the common good of humanity".

The Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith made a similar call to all Catholics in its note on the morality of Covid-19 vaccines.



President pays tribute to priest theologian

Fr Enda McDonagh has been remembered by the Archbishop of Tuam as "a colossus on the Irish theological landscape for more than six decades", while Ireland's President said he would be missed by so many, following his death at the age of 90.

Archbishop Michael Neary led tributes to the "known and respected" priest, recalling his "genuine humility and personal warmth", which meant "people felt comfortable in his presence, and enriched by the encounter".

Noting that Fr McDonagh had "well thought-out opinions of his own", the archbishop said he "was always utterly respectful of those who had different and sincerely held opinions".

Ordained to the priesthood in 1955, Fr McDonagh was appointed Professor of Moral Theology and Canon Law in Maynooth University at the age of 28. He was also the official chaplain to Mary Robinson during her presidency.

President Michael D Higgins said Fr McDonagh would be "missed for a multitude of good reasons".

He died on 24th February 2021.

Sinabung wakes the neighbours

A huge pall of smoke explodes out of Indonesia's Mount Sinabung, spewing a massive column of smoke and ash up to 5,000 metres into the sky.

The volcano on Sumatra erupted early on Tuesday, the local geological agency said, in 13 separate bursts.

Authorities have instructed residents to avoid a 5km radius around the crater, a zone that has been left unoccupied for years as volcanic activity increased.

Photo: Mohammed Sincharly



Williamson asked to pause RSE lessons

A coalition of Christian educators and bodies has written to the Secretary of State for Education, urging him to postpone the implementation this summer of Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) lessons.

Led by Anglican Bishop Michael Nazir-Ali on behalf of the constituent bodies of the Christian Coalition For Education, the letter states that many parents have not been properly consulted on the new curriculum because of the pandemic and school closures.

Therefore, 'if schools are to have any chance of truly taking their parents with them in this, there cannot be any shadow of doubt the mandatory process has been completed properly'.

Order drops its plan to exhume society founder

Simon Caldwell

A religious order has withdrawn its request to exhume its founder and transfer some of her remains from England to the United States.

The Society of the Holy Child Jesus announced that it was abandoning its plans to move some of the remains of Philadelphia-born Mother Cornelia Connelly from a chapel in Mayfield School, the independent Catholic girls' school which she founded in East Sussex, to the Cathedral Basilica of Ss Peter and Paul in Philadelphia.

"A decision has been made to withdraw the application to the Historic Churches Commission for the exhumation of the Venerable Cornelia Connelly," said a statement, signed by Srs Veronica Openibo, Pauline Darby, Cecilia Nya and Marie Ursino, who form the order's leadership team.

The statement was issued after more than a thousand English Catholics objected to proposals to open Mother Connelly's tomb in a 14th-century chapel in St Leonards-on-Sea so relics could be extracted and enshrined in Philadelphia by the summer.

Britain's Ministry of Justice and the Vatican Congregation of Saints' Causes approved the transfer, but 270 objections were lodged with Catholic Historic Churches and Wealden District Council, the local authority whose permission was also required.

An online petition opposing the exhumation also attracted almost 1,500 signatures. Cesca Sims, its organiser, said Mother Connelly's remains should remain in Mayfield because it was "the place she chose to be buried".

The translation of the relics was arranged in the hope that pilgrims would pray for the miracles sought for her beatification and canonisation.



Mother Cornelia Connelly

Mother Connelly was declared venerable in 1992.

Mother Connelly was married and had five children before she and her husband, Pierce, an Episcopalian priest, left their church to become Catholics. She took a vow of perpetual chastity when her husband was ordained a Catholic priest and travelled to England with him when he went to serve as a chaplain to the Earl of Shrewsbury, a Catholic.

There, Church officials insisted that, to avoid scandal, the pair had no communication other than correspondence, and pressure was exerted upon Mother Connelly to leave the country. But she remained and, with the help of her husband, founded her order of nuns in 1847, becoming its first superior general. It is now active in 14 countries.

Mother Connelly was buried in the convent cemetery in Mayfield, but her remains were exhumed and placed in the chapel in 1935.

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The take-up of Covid vaccines in the UK has thankfully been high, especially when compared with nations across the Channel, where the effects of playing politics over the vaccine has led to a wide-spread refusal among the public to accept the AstraZeneca jab.

Official figures suggest that well over 90 per cent of those who have been offered a jab in this country have accepted one, with hopes that the figure will remain high as younger age groups are inoculated.

There are concerns, however, about a reluctance among some parts of the population to come forward. While the purpose of the vaccine is predominantly to protect the individual, leaving lockdown depends on as many people being vaccinated as possible in order to reduce virus transmission.

The Queen's intervention last week was, therefore, welcome. She told NHS workers via video that her own jab had not hurt, and that while she understands some people might be anxious about having one themselves, they ought to think about the wellbeing of others.

Appealing to altruism is in keeping with the Queen's ethic of public service. The news that the Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh had been vaccinated brought memories back to 1957, when the campaign to boost take-up of the polio vaccine benefitted from the news that the Queen's own children had received their shots.

The Queen has a unique ability to tap into the consciousness of the nation. During the video call, one doctor said that if he could bottle this current community spirit and use it for other purposes, he would. "Wouldn't it be nice," replied the Queen, invoking her experience of the war.

There have been errors in public policy in the past year, but also a great deal of selflessness of the variety that Her Majesty has always promoted.

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The pandemic has shifted the way politicians talk to us

Andrew S. Roe-Crines

The social impact of Covid-19 is self-evident. It has touched the everyday aspects of each of our lives, from simple tasks such as shopping, to meeting family members on Zoom, to (not) socialising with friends. Each of these has been transformed over the last year in ways never imagined before March 2020.

This can also be said of the kind of language politicians use – and of the expectations their audiences have when listening to them. This is because politicians are no longer able to appear in front of crowds, be they large or small. They don't meet voters or their parties, and even in Parliament they are only speaking in front of a small, socially distanced group of fellow MPs.

All this affects the quality of our liberal democratic discourse. It also changes the kinds of arguments politicians use to justify their decisions (and the extent to which such changes are exposed to genuine democratic scrutiny).

For example, since March 2020, changes to the norms, values and expectations of a free society have changed at speed with little parliamentary or media scrutiny. In order to impose lockdowns, freedoms have been restricted. These changes were done for public health reasons but they still pose a significant challenge to conventions of a democratic society.

Pandemic PMQs

Ordinarily, prime minister's questions would be a riotous occasion in the House of Commons. Party leaders seek to expose the intellectual and political deficiencies of their opponent and their arguments. The conventional purpose of this exercise is for each leader to whip their backbenchers into a vocal frenzy of support, thereby showing they can lead their party to potential future victory at the polls.

Covid has dialled back the volume considerably. The pandemic has removed most of the physical audience (MPs), and changed the tone of questions and answers so that they are now more comparable to a



forensic select committee. Gone are loud displays of support, or the need for the Speaker to regularly demand "order!" Under the current circumstances, PMQs has been transformed into a sedate exchange of questions and answers. There is little to no interaction with the physical or virtual audiences of MPs.

Another arena to have rhetorically been affected by Covid are media engagements. Sit-down interviews occasionally continue in a socially distant way on some of the bigger weekly programmes but on the rolling news channels, politicians are now 'Zoomed in' from their home offices which, in themselves, send interesting messages to the audience. Politicians will use these settings to try to convince audiences of their rhetorical character, using props such as books, framed pictures or other items such as plants. The aim is to make the interview slightly more open and potentially more composed by placing the political figure in a domestic setting, yet this set up lacks the conventional confrontational framing provided by a face-to-face interview which is often required for genuine scrutiny.

Party faithful, I think you're on mute?

Finally, the party conference has inevitably been substantially affected by Covid and with it the ability

of party leaders to engage with their supporters. Normally the keynote party leader speech would be a chance to articulate an ideological renewal strategy. It's the leader's chance to show they are capable of continuing to lead their party and to enjoy their support through audience reactions such as applause.

The virtual conference cuts out a key measure of how much support a leader really has – the sound of the audience. Without that feedback, party leaders are left speaking into a camera in the hope that the audience accepts their arguments without really knowing if it does. That affects the vocal tone of their delivery and overall speaking style. This has been a significant issue for Labour leader Keir Starmer, especially as he has yet to appear before the Labour Party conference in person as leader.

Why it matters

The impact of Covid on these rhetorical arena affects the ability of one of our key democratic norms to function – communication. Without communication (or rhetoric), there is no meaningful liberal democratic society or scrutiny of our political leaders. This is not to suggest our liberal democracy has ceased to function (indeed, its move into the virtual realm is a testament to its strength). However, the manner in which PMQs is currently functioning impedes not just scrutiny but

also the ability of party leaders to lead their parliamentary parties.

The use of virtual interviews affects the ability of interviews to truly hold political leaders to account, given the changing tone in the environment. And the digital party conference prevents activists from showing their support for party leaders through applause. It is important that a party leader solicits applause from their supporters as it shows the wider electorate that they lead a supportive party. Without applause, it is unclear if they have a united party behind them that supports their leadership or broader agenda.

Needless to say, these situations are unavoidable during the Covid pandemic because safety rightly comes first. However, it is important that in a post-Covid world, the norms and expectations of political communication are returned to their liberal democratic norms of vocal and uncomfortable accountability for healthy engagement between political leaders and voters to return. When it is safe to do so, it is vital that in these areas the 'new normal' resembles the 'old normal'.

Andrew S. Roe-Crines is a lecturer in British politics at the University of Liverpool

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O'Neill calls for abortions attacked by pro-lifers

Nick Benson

Pro-lifers have called for the resignation of Deputy First Minister Michelle O'Neill as they condemned Sinn Féin's call for more abortions in Northern Ireland.

The criticism comes as Ms O'Neill pressurised Health Minister Robin Swann to ensure that abortion is made available across the region.

Ms O'Neill said "leadership" was expected from Mr Swann and accused him of "failing".

"Since the framework came into effect there has been a legal responsibility on the health minister to ensure that he provides abortion services and that they're provided via the health trusts here," she told the Legislative Assembly. "The minister should end the delay and fulfil his legal responsibilities to make these services available to women. His failure to do so to date is totally unacceptable."

Her call comes after it was revealed that almost 1,100 lives had been lost to abortion in Northern Ireland since 31st March 2020, when the British Government imposed it on the region.

Pro-life group Precious Life condemned Ms O'Neill's "hypocritical" comments and called for her to resign. Its director, Bernadette Smyth, said: "Michelle O'Neill's call for more babies in the womb to be killed is totally unacceptable."

"She is a hypocrite. Since March last year she has been stood on a podium lecturing us on saving lives, but at the same time 1,091 little unborn babies have been killed in Northern Ireland. She failed them."

"But it appears those 1,091 deaths aren't enough, she now wants even more babies' lives to be taken by abortion. Those who voted for her should demand her resignation."

Catherine Robinson, of Right To Life UK, said the dispute illustrates the "unwavering commitment" of some abortion supporters, as it is not enough for them to have achieved legislative victory – they want anything perceived to inhibit abortion access removed.

"Pro-lifers should be equally uncompromising when it comes to opposing an ideology that sees the relationship between mother and unborn baby as one of animosity," she said. "The interests of both need not be opposed to one another. As pro-lifers, we believe it is possible to love them both."

Bernadette Smyth (top) has called on Michelle O'Neill to resign after her call for more abortion access in Northern Ireland



A woman holds up a sign during a rally against assisted suicide. Photo: CNS/Art Babych

Report says people who wish to die change mind

Nick Benson

Research that found a 'wish to die' among older adults was usually temporary has huge ramifications for Ireland's current debate on introducing assisted suicide, medical experts have said.

The research, by Trinity College Dublin, found most older people who had suicidal thoughts were either lonely or temporarily depressed.

Almost three-quarters (72 per cent) of participants over the age of 50 who had expressed a wish to die had changed their minds two years later, said the Irish Longitudinal Study on Ageing (TILDA).

The finding was taken from a study of 8,174 community-dwelling adults aged over 50, four per cent of whom had initially expressed a wish to die.

One out of 29 community-dwelling older people reported that during the preceding month they had felt that they would rather be dead – with 60 per cent of those who reported a wish to die suffering from a co-existing depressive illness. Almost three-quarters of those with a wish to die were also lonely.

However, 72 per cent of these participants no longer reported a wish to die when reassessed two years later, indicating that in many cases the desire to end their lives does not persist. In cases where people no longer wished to end their lives, loneliness and/or depressive symptoms had improved significantly, suggesting an important link.

Professor Rose Anne Kenny, head of medical gerontology, at Trinity College and a consultant geriatrician at St James's Hospital, Dublin, and a senior author of the study, said the findings are particularly relevant given the current debate around euthanasia and the Dying with Dignity Bill 2020.

"Almost two-thirds of participants expressing a wish to die in this study have at least one chronic illness; meeting the criteria for a 'terminal illness' as proposed in the bill," she said.

"This study demonstrates that a wish to die in later life is often transient but is closely linked with remediable factors such as loneliness and social isolation, the burden of which is likely to increase significantly during the Covid-19 pandemic."

Researchers proposed that an enhanced focus on improving access to mental health care is needed, rather than bringing in legislation on assisted suicide. They also propose that addressing social isolation in older people should be a public health priority, noting that this is particularly pertinent during the Covid-19 pandemic. "These findings demonstrate the close association between depression and the wish to die in later life," said Dr Robert Briggs, a medical gerontologist at Trinity College and consultant geriatrician at St James's Hospital, Dublin, who was the first author of the study.

"Most older people with both a wish to die and co-existing depression had not been formally diagnosed with depression, nor received appropriate mental health treatment."

"Less than one tenth had received psychological counselling."

"There needs to be an enhanced focus on improving access to mental health care, and this should therefore form an important part of any discussion around assisted dying in later life."

Irish doctors reject euthanasia plans

More than 2,000 Irish healthcare professionals have expressed their grave concern at attempts to introduce assisted suicide and euthanasia in the Republic of Ireland.

In an open letter, the medics warn that the current Dying with Dignity Bill being discussed in the Dail 'creates risks for many receiving healthcare that outweigh any potential benefits'.

'We, the undersigned, are gravely

concerned by the proposal to legislate for assisted suicide and euthanasia, also described as assisted dying in Ireland,' they write.

'As healthcare professionals we have respect for each individual, value personal autonomy and also share an interest in protecting and advocating for people who are nearing the end of their lives and who may be vulnerable and at risk.'

Among their concerns are the

impact it will have on those who already struggle to have their voices heard in society, such as older adults, the disabled and those with mental illness.

They also fear that the most vulnerable may feel pressured if they think they are a burden.

'We believe the proposed bill legislating for euthanasia and assisted suicide should not become law,' they say.



Media giants named and shamed in list

Netflix, Twitter, Amazon and Google's Chromebook have been named in a list of 12 mainstream contributors to sexual exploitation.

Produced by the US National Center on Sexual Exploitation (NCOSE), the list, known as the 'Dirty Dozen', highlights institutions that are facilitating and even profiting from sexual exploitation.

This year's list features several entities which have profited from the Covid-19 crisis by taking advantage of worsening social and economic vulnerabilities and harnessing the dramatic increase in online activity.

Familiar names in this years list include media giants Netflix, Twitter, Amazon, Chromebook and Reddit.

The list also includes Discord, a messaging app for teens; Ebsco Information Services, the leading provider of online learning resources for schools and libraries in the US; Varisign, a global provider of domain name registry services; and Wish, a top ten retail shopping website and app.

The NCOSE also targeted three of the Dirty Dozen for their links to prostitution – Onlyfans, a social media subscription website where accounts make money via posted content made exclusively available to followers known as 'fans'; SeekingArrangement, a 'sugar daddy' dating site; and the state of Nevada, which has long allowed legalised prostitution.

DUP MP to chair Westminster pro-life group

Northern Irish MP Carla Lockhart has expressed her delight at being appointed the Co-Chair of the All Party Parliamentary Pro-Life Group in Westminster, saying "a mammoth and sobering task" lies ahead in restoring life-affirming laws across the UK.

The DUP MP for Upper Bann said she was "absolutely delighted" at the appointment. She will serve alongside fellow co-chair Fiona Bruce and Vice Chair Sir Jeffrey Donaldson.

"I am passionate about protecting the unborn," she said. "I am deeply humbled by this appointment. It is a mammoth and sobering task as we seek to restore life-affirming laws across the UK."

Ms Lockhart used her maiden speech in the House of Commons to "highlight the anger and frustration" that Westminster had "foisted abortion upon the people of Northern Ireland".



A world community?

John Battle



Pope Francis regularly urges world leaders to work together for peace, justice and the common good of humanity and the earth.

At the end of the Second World War the Catholic philosopher, Jacques Maritain, helped draft the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It built a framework of justice based on reasoned agreement and paved the way for the United Nations, a coming together of independent countries to implement it.

In the event, despite some success of its humanitarian and peacekeeping bodies, political conflicts and national interests of superpowers undermined its co-operating potential. The UN Security Council has been strategically deadlocked by the major powers.

Despite the problems, Catholic social teaching throughout the 20th century and up to the present has remained a strong advocate of the United Nations.

More recently there have been attempts to reinforce international justice with the institution of the International Criminal Court at the Hague. Just before the 2001 General Election, as Foreign Minister I took through Parliament a Bill that signed the UK up to the International Criminal Court in the teeth of the Opposition (who pleaded exceptionalism) and with the USA refusing to acknowledge it. Since then there has been some progress. Cases have been brought against dictators, tyrants and rogue states without legal capacities to hold them to account. Individuals from Africa and Bosnia have been tried. Last month investigations were launched against Israel and Hamas over alleged war crimes in the West Bank and Gaza. But it is far from a fully supported international process. As David Miliband of the International Rescue Committee warns, we are in an "age of impunity". Assad's Syria, the Rohingya people in Myanmar and the Chinese treatment of the Uighur Muslims are all beyond the reach of the ICC as they refuse to sign up. In other words, murderous atrocities escape justice because states opt out of recognising the ICC. Claiming sovereignty and arguing over the definition of 'genocide' has held back the emergence, post-Nuremberg, of an agreed international body to which all are accountable for justice and peace.

Perhaps a recognition of the success of scientific international co-operation to tackle the pandemic will spur politicians to acknowledge that international alliance and co-operation is the way forward, and that without it no country can be safe, just, peaceful and free.

World yields to soft power delivered at point of syringe

Michael Jennings



The Covid-19 pandemic has given rise to various new, repurposed or newly popular terms. The newest entry to the pandemic lexicon might be 'vaccine diplomacy', with some countries using their jabs to strengthen regional ties and enhance their own power and global status.

In early February, half a million doses of the Chinese Sinopharm Covid-19 vaccine arrived in Pakistan, before soon also reaching 13 other countries including Cambodia, Nepal, Sierra Leone and Zimbabwe. The Chinese ambassador to Pakistan declared it a "manifestation of our brotherhood", a sentiment echoed by the Pakistani government.

Russia has similarly used its own Sputnik V vaccine to win friends and support, providing access to countries as yet unable to start their own vaccination programmes.

India has been donating supplies of the AstraZeneca/Oxford jabs produced in the country to regional neighbours including Bangladesh, Myanmar and Nepal, bolstering not only its reputation as a supplier of cheap and accessible vaccines to the global south, but also challenging China's efforts at regional dominance at a time of heightened tensions between the two countries.

Meanwhile, Israel has reportedly agreed to pay Russia to send its Sputnik V vaccine to the Syrian government as part of a pro-vaccine diplomat strategy which has also involved efforts to undermine trust in the intentions and efficacy of rival powers. China and Russia have both been accused by governments in Europe and North America of state-backed disinformation campaigns seeking to undermine trust in vaccines produced in those regions. Russia sent supplies of Sputnik V to Hungary, in a move seen by some as designed to undermine EU unity and credibility.

Europe and North America have been late to the game in providing vaccines to poorer countries and regions. Calls from leaders such as France's Emmanuel Macron to donate vaccines to poorer countries, and pledges from the UK to donate surplus supplies, have only emerged in recent days.

Strings attached?

In the absence of providing vaccines to poorer countries, some in the west sought to cast doubt on the credibility of Chinese and Russian efforts, presenting them as cynical



Indian-produced samples of the AstraZeneca vaccine have been used to promote Indian influence in Asia

plays for diplomatic advantage. You may be getting vaccines, they have been telling the world, but at what cost in your obligations to Russia and China – even as western countries wrap their own international aid in conditions, often involving aspirations for trade deals.

The response to the virus has been embedded in global power and diplomatic wrangles from the very start – from the Trump administration referring to "the Chinese virus" at every turn as part of its wider political and economic struggles with China, to Chinese efforts to use its own success to enhance the legitimacy of strict measures and curbs on political and social freedoms.

Fighting disease has, in fact, long been used as a means for extending soft power and winning friends. Superpower rivalries for influence through the needle have sometimes even been positive: the success of the smallpox eradication campaign

was in part fuelled by the rivalry between the Soviet Union and US. Responding to the Sars epidemic in 2002, China provided assistance and support to affected countries to bolster its global power status, including to Taiwan. This stands in stark contrast to its more tense relationship with Taiwan during this latest pandemic.

Such assistance has tended to accrue the most soft-power influence when aid has been seen as impartial and free from naked self-interest. Before being merged with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, for example, the reputation of the UK's former Department for International Development (DfID) was in part enhanced by its legally enshrined focus on poverty and its autonomous status. The current round of vaccine diplomacy on all sides is neither.

The prospect of global health becoming a new arena for global

power competition and rivalry should worry us all. Whatever benefits may have emerged from such rivalries in the past, they did so through co-operative rivalry. The global response to Covid-19 has thus far tended to be unco-operative and divisive, casting blame or seeking to spread distrust.

The complexities of global health, and the needs of the billions excluded from the benefits of vaccine science and innovation, demand a truly global response.

Whether responding to Covid-19 will lead to a more equal partnership for health for all, or reinforce some of the worst instincts displayed during the past year, will determine not only the course of Covid-19 but the impact of the next epidemic to threaten global health, and the ones that follow that.

Michael Jennings is a reader in International Development, SOAS, University of London.



Abortion pills at home have public worried

An overwhelming majority of people in England are concerned about women receiving abortion pills in the post, a new opinion poll has revealed.

Seven in ten adults in England (71 per cent) say they are concerned about women having a medical abortion at home after a phone or video consultation with a doctor, while 82 per cent say they are concerned about the possibility of abortion pills being falsely obtained for another person via a telemedicine abortion appointment.

The risk of women being coerced into an abortion with a telemedicine abortion is a factor even more (84 per cent), with only 11 per cent not concerned. Eighty-four per cent are also concerned at women finding it distressing potentially having to dispose of the terminated pregnancy alone.

The poll was carried out on behalf of SPUC as the Government consults on whether scheme to allow abortion pills through the post, initially announced as a temporary measure during Covid-19 restrictions, should be made permanent.

Rough sleeping numbers down

The number of rough sleepers has fallen by more than a third in a year, new data shows, but numbers are still 52 per cent higher than in 2010 when such data was first collected.

The snapshot figures show that 2,688 people were sleeping rough on the autumn night of data capture.

That's 37 per cent lower than in 2019, but it was still 52 per cent higher than in 2010 when the data first started being collected (1,768), the low figure was down to the Government's 'Everybody In' scheme, launched to combat the Covid-19 pandemic.

Protecting minorities must be linked to aid cash – Alton

Nick Benson

Lord David Alton of Liverpool has urged the UK to press Pakistan on how it uses UK aid money to address the injustices minorities face in the country.

The Catholic peer's call came as he marked the 10th anniversary of the assassination of Clement Shahbaz Bhatti by paying tribute to "one of the most compelling and outstanding, courageous political figures of recent years".

Lord Alton has marked the murder of Bhatti every year since his assassination a decade ago.

Bhatti, Pakistan's Federal Minister for Minorities, was gunned down on 2nd March 2011 after he said he would seek the reform of Pakistan's blasphemy laws to stop them from being misused to persecute innocent Christians.

Bhatti's murder demands our attention to the "gross violations of human rights" that take place in the country, said Lord Alton, as he questioned the almost £3billion UK aid provided to Pakistan in the decade since Bhatti's death.

"Shahbaz Bhatti's memory demands that we keep asking to know how that money is being used to address the injustices against which he stood," he said.

Reiterating his "profound admiration" for Bhatti, who was also a Catholic, Lord Alton recalled how his murder "robbed Pakistan of a dedicated, honest and able politician". His death "threw into sharp relief the plight of Pakistan's minorities, whose fearless champion he had become".

"Bhatti gave his life trying to make



Christian women hold pictures of Shahbaz Bhatti, the slain Pakistani minister of minorities, as they demand a sentence for his killers during a protest in Karachi, Pakistan. Photo: Athar Hussain, Reuters

a reality of the constitution of Pakistan's enlightened founding father, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, who insisted that minorities should be given respect and treated as equal citizens," he said.

The peer recalled how in 1947, at the time of partition, Muhammad Ali Jinnah gave a speech to the New Delhi Press Club, setting out the basis on which the new state of Pakistan was to be founded.

In this speech he forcefully defended the right of minorities to be protected and to have their beliefs respected.

However, Lord Alton highlighted the cruel treatment many minority communities continue to face in Pakistan to this day, as he pointed out

that they still do not enjoy the rights Muhammad Ali Jinnah had envisioned for his country.

"How a country treats its minorities is a litmus test," said Lord Alton. "Pakistan simply needs to re-examine its own foundation principles to see that it is failing the minorities who face discrimination and outright persecution."

"The white in the flag of Pakistan is there to represent the country's minorities but as those minorities suffer and Pakistan's law enforcement agencies and frightened leaders fail to speak out or to act justly in their defence, its flag has been dragged low and for too many it has become

streaked in the red of blood."

Noting that no-one was ever brought to justice for Bhatti's murder, Lord Alton asked what chance do the country's persecuted minorities have if that country can't bring to justice a killer of one of its government ministers in a decade since the assassination.

"Pakistan was founded on principles of equality and justice. What has been done to its own citizens, and done with impunity, makes a mockery of those high ideals," said Lord Alton.

"Failure to act jeopardises the country's future and it undermines the prospect of a diverse and respectful society."

Cardinal: We need laws to check the extremists

Unambiguous legislation is needed to combat extremism, Cardinal Vincent Nichols has warned.

"Extremism is a danger and so we need to work together to ensure there is unambiguous legislation that not only prevents and penalises those spreading it, but equally protects those who experience it," he said.

The cardinal's call came as he voiced his support for a new report by the Commission for Countering Extremism, which draws attention to gaps in legislation that allow extremists to operate with impunity in the UK.

The landmark report, *Operating with Impunity*, evidences some of the most shocking and dangerous extremist content currently lawful in Britain.

Describing the report as "a significant contribution to a most important issue", Cardinal Nichols said: "The rise of hateful extremism, not least through the use of social media, is a grave concern and calls for ongoing

efforts by all who have our common good at heart.

"Our society must be characterised by a determination both to counter hateful extremism which seeks to inflict harm, and to protect freedom of speech. This report is a stimulating voice in drawing attention to these matters, with all their sensitivity and resonance."

The cardinal noted that freedom of religion and freedom of speech must include the right to express opinions which run counter to a prevailing cultural consensus without embracing or proposing hate or violence.

While warning against the threat of political and populist extremism, Cardinal Nichols pointed out that "Pope Francis has said, in *Fratelli Tutti*, that 'authentic social dialogue involves the ability to respect the other's point of view and to admit that it may include legitimate concerns... it is desirable that they should articulate their positions for the sake of fruitful public debate'."



Ready for the pope

A worker hangs the Vatican flag on a pole in Najaf, Iraq, as the city readies itself for the visit of Pope Francis this weekend. Photo: Alaa Al-Marjani, Reuters

IN BRIEF

MP loses chance for Asylum Worker act

Catholic MP Carol Monaghan has expressed her disappointment after she was unable to present her Private Member's Bill on Asylum Seekers' work rights to the House of Commons.

The Bill was scheduled to have its Second Reading on Friday 5th March 2021. However, last month the House of Commons agreed a motion to temporarily suspend Westminster Hall and sitting Fridays in an effort to make the Houses of Parliament safer during the Covid-19 pandemic.

The Bill would have given asylum seekers the right to work in the UK after they had waited six months on their asylum application decision.

Ms Monaghan expressed her disappointment at not having the chance to present the Bill but said she understood why the decision had been taken.

"I support any measures that protect the wider public and my colleagues from the risks of Covid-19," she said. "However, this is a very urgent issue. Current asylum seeker policy essentially equates to a working ban, blocking asylum seekers from working for months on end, and others indefinitely."

Charity backs axe for Vagrancy Act

Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government Robert Jenrick has told the House of Commons that the Vagrancy Act should be "consigned to history".

The 19th century law was reviewed in 2019 and Mr Jenrick admitted that "antiquated" legislation, which criminalises rough sleeping and begging, should be repealed.

Housing charity Crisis has been calling for an end to the 1824 legislation. Jon Sparkes, its chief executive, said: "The Secretary of State is absolutely right to say the Act should be repealed. It does nothing to tackle the root causes of rough sleeping and drives people further away from support."

Christian's dismissal lawful, says court

The Court of Appeal has ruled that the sacking of a Christian non-executive NHS director and magistrate for saying that children do best when raised by a mother and a father was "lawful".

Richard Page, 74, from Kent, was suspended from the magistracy and forced out of a role at an NHS Trust after saying on TV that his Christian beliefs on parenting had influenced an adoption case.

He launched a six-year legal battle seeking justice against the decisions to remove him, and described the late judgment as a "significant step in developing further limitations on freedom of speech for Christians in the workplace."

He vowed to continue his fight to the Supreme Court.

Catholic schools barring the way for faithful to attend

CATHOLIC COMMENT**Caroline Farrow**

Millions of families received their secondary school offers this week, provoking mixed reactions. Families who were fortunate enough to get into their first choice school would have been jumping for joy and looking forward to the next phase of education for their child, on that will be, God willing, free from coronavirus restrictions, whereas others will now be facing more weeks of nail-biting and anxiety.

I've had an insight into how that must feel because, believe it or not, our daughter has not been awarded a place at our local state Catholic secondary school, even though her father is a serving priest in the local deanery... which might make it all rather awkward next time he has to attend school to celebrate Mass or offer the sacrament of confession to the students!

Unlike many other parents, we are in the fortunate position of being able to send our daughter to the local independent Catholic school, although it remains to be seen whether or not the other younger siblings will be able to attend. Or whether we can afford to save for retirement!

But what the situation has exposed is a glaring flaw in how Catholic schools operate admissions criteria, one which the Catholic Education Service must urgently address.

Admittedly, our situation is an unusual one, but it seems like a very poor advertisement for the system when a Catholic priest can't even get his daughter into their first choice of Catholic school.

The saga began in November last year when I received a phone call from the school asking for proof of our daughter's 'Catholicity'. Realising that this wasn't a wind up, I explained that my daughter had been baptised by her father when he was an Anglican minister, on the advice of our local Catholic parish priest. As a baptised Catholic I obviously wished to raise the children as Catholic too, and the priest said that an Anglican baptism was perfectly valid and I ought not to deprive my husband of the privilege of baptising his own child. He would supply further ceremonies to officially receive my daughter into the Catholic Church around First Holy Communion. It was, it seemed, a perfect pastoral response to an unusual situation.

As events transpired, my husband converted shortly afterwards and so my daughter was received into the Catholic Church as a toddler. The priest correctly informed us that as a toddler, she was too young to have an official reception or certificate of reception, but duly amended the



baptism certificate with his signature and the date on which the Catholic ceremonies were supplied, as well as making an entry in the parish register. And that, as we thought, was that!

Explaining this to the admissions personnel, I gently enquired whether or not they realised that my husband was a Catholic priest, which felt like the ultimate 'do you know who I am' moment!

'-vgj -'pyt v- "uy"xt "u-"xsk g said the jobsworth, "but that isn't going to cut the mustard if there is an appeal and we have to explain why we categorised her as Catholic. We need the documentation to prove it. Could you give me the details of the priest who amended the baptism form so we can contact him to verify that she is Catholic?"

This was followed by the request that "you are Mass-attendees; we will need a certificate of Reception, because that's what's in our paperwork."

Naturally the parish priest involved was happy to co-operate, though he expressed his annoyance with the school for their lack of common sense, reiterating that no official Certificate of Reception would be issued because this was not needed or required by canon law. The amended baptism certificate, signed by him and containing the parish stamp ought to be sufficient.

I almost wrote about it for *The Universe* at the time, because the situation struck me as so absurd and I was concerned that other parents who were unable to satisfy the strict paper-pushing exercise, could be unfairly disadvantaged, especially if they were immigrants unable to locate the original birth certificate.

I certainly felt alienated and unwelcomed by a Catholic school seemingly lacking in all common sense and compassion, and began to wonder whether or not we had in

fact made the right choice, if this was their attitude. It made it easy to see how the Church could lose followers, this being a prime example of the rigidity so often railed about by Pope Francis.

However, perhaps naively, I trusted that it had all been sorted out, until we received a notification that my daughter had not received a place. Either it's been a bumper year for Catholic siblings at the school, or they have, as I strongly suspect, not categorised our daughter as Catholic.

Which brings me to another bone of contention. As well as being Catholic, one of the factors which will guarantee you access to a Catholic school is having attended one of the local Catholic state feeder schools listed on their criteria. For many schools this is no doubt as fair a method as any and has the advantage of not ruffling too many local authority, Ofsted or secular feathers.

That said, it's distinctly un-Catholic, because parents are the primary educators and it ought to be up to them where to educate their children. There could be very good reasons why a child has not attended a local Catholic feeder, such as, for example, not being able to get a place, or the school being too far to travel to, a child having particular needs, and so on, yet this ought not to deprive a Catholic child of the chance of a Catholic education.

Once again, we didn't meet the criteria of having attended a feeder school, because, guess what, there were no places for our children at the local Catholic primary feeder schools when we were moved by the Church at short notice to the parish. So if we wanted a local Catholic primary school for our children, the independent sector was the only choice.

There are a whole host of ways the process could be made fairer. Proof of First Holy Communion seems to me a much better way of ensuring a

child's Catholicity and at least then one would be assured that the child has had a period of ongoing catechesis and involvement in a local parish.

I can't tell you why my daughter hasn't got a place. The school has a terse answerphone message informing parents who were unsuccessful that they will go on a waiting list after 15th March but the school won't, helpfully, tell you where you are on that list. We are also told to go to the local county council to appeal, but it's very difficult to appeal when you can't understand why your child didn't qualify for a place, given according to the criteria, they ought to have been fairly high up the list.

As I said, my daughter is very fortunate. I can shake the dust from my sandals and my daughter is very much looking forward to her private school place – although she did ask whether the school who turned her down knows that she does say her prayers every night.

If I wanted I probably could move hell and high water to appeal, although if I am finding the process daunting, infuriating, Kafka-esque and abhorring the supercilious unavailability nature of the school. It struck me that if I'm struggling, goodness knows how a less privileged person who didn't have English as a first language, would manage.

Our story does at least explain why parish priests shouldn't simply just sign the school forms, no questions asked, for families they haven't seen since the child was baptised and know they are unlikely to see again.

The Catholic Education Service should take note, it shouldn't take a sharp-elbowed middle-class response from a tenacious parent in order to secure a child a place at a Catholic school.

Caroline Farrow is a Catholic journalist and UK campaign director and media commentator for Citizens Go

Toddlers caught up in war of words over LGBTQ propaganda

Nick Benson

Parents and distressed members of the public have taken to social media to voice their concern at popular Nickelodeon animated children's TV show *Blue's Clues & You!*, accusing it of promoting gender identity propaganda to toddlers.

The criticism comes after the show's YouTube channel shared a video of lead character Blue – a blue spotted dog, voiced by Traci Paige – singing through the alphabet.

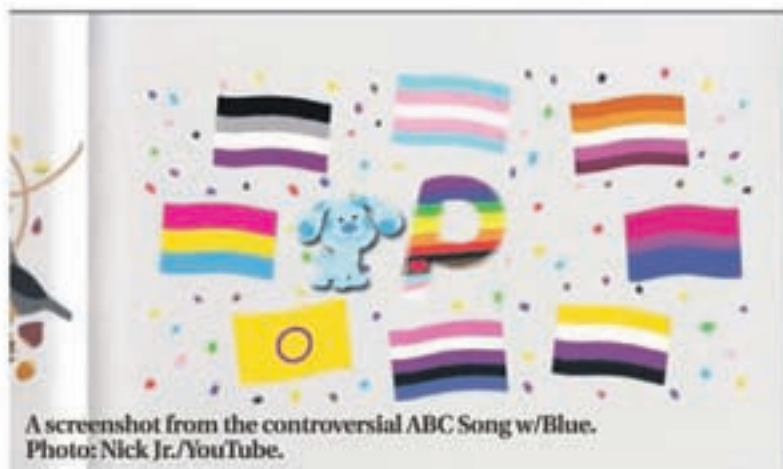
In the video, titled *ABC Song w/Blue*, the character assigns different words to each letter, with the letter 'P' being declared as 'full of Pride'.

In the video the letter is surrounded by a number of flags representing various LGBTQ communities, including the transgender community, asexual community, pansexual community, intersex community, non-binary community and gender-fluid community.

Blue's Clues & You! is an educational children's show that first premiered in 1996 as *Blue's Clues* as part of Nickelodeon's Nick Jr. programming, aimed at children from the ages of two to six. It was rebooted with the new title in 2019.

The highly controversial *ABC Song w/Blue* received contrasting responses, with LGBTQ activists reacting with praise while concerned parents vowed not to allow their young children to watch the programme.

Sammi Chan, an animator for Nick



A screenshot from the controversial ABC Song w/Blue. Photo: Nick Jr./YouTube.

Jr., tweeted: 'The first thing that came to my mind was "P is for pride" when I got the script. I am so excited that all of ya'll are as happy as I am! I also did all the letters and graphics for this episode to be as inclusive as possible for Black History Month! #PRIDE #BluesClues #LGBTQIA'.

LGBTQ Nation responded to the video by declaring: 'It's never too early for kids to learn to be proud just for being themselves.'

However, others, who believe that such material is not appropriate for toddlers, did not share this sentiment.

One parent tweeted: 'No Blue's Clues for my kids! #indoctrination #LGBTQ'.

Another Twitter user said: '3-5 year olds are incapable of processing this. Disgusting.'

One tweeted that Blue's Clues is 'a baby/toddler show', adding: 'the indoctrination is apparent' and another branded the use of transgender propaganda on the show 'frightening'.

This is the most recent incident of Nickelodeon and other children's programmes and channels including LGBTQ messages.

Last June, Nickelodeon indicated that popular cartoon character *Spongebob Squarepants* was a member of the LGBTQ community in a tweet celebrating Pride month.

However, it did not confirm whether this was its intention.

Last year, Nick Jr. also shared a post via social media encouraging parents to teach their children the meaning of the LGBTQ flag.

Citizens' shock over Cadbury's explicit Easter egg adverts

Nick Benson

Thousands of people have signed a petition calling for the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) to ban a Cadbury advert featuring a gay couple sharing a Crème Egg during an overly passionate kiss.

Noting that Cadbury is 'well aware of the religious significance of Easter', the CitizenGo campaign accuses the confectionery company of causing 'gratuitous offence to members of the Christian community during the most important feast in their calendar'.

The petition, which has been signed by over 65,000 people, notes how the couple 'uses their lips and tongue to exchange the contents of a Crème Egg; an image which many consumers have complained is both disgusting and off-putting'.

The petition suggests that Cadbury, in its decision to feature a same-sex couple, is 'clearly hoping to cause controversy and escape criticism'.



It suggests that the confectioner will respond to any criticism 'by claiming that any objections must be rooted in homophobia', but notes that 'members of the LGBT community have also expressed their dislike of this campaign'.

'Cadbury should not be seeking to hide under cover of LGBT rights to conduct a campaign which sexually objectifies individuals,' the petition reads. 'If the couple in question were heterosexual, the advertisement would likely be prohibited, given the sexually

explicit and graphic nature of the kiss.'

The petition notes that Cadbury Crème Eggs have become a synonymous part of Easter celebrations in the UK. It also points out that the company is associated with families and is well aware that its products are enjoyed by children, as it deliberately markets them to this demographic, making this campaign 'even more irresponsible'.

'Exposing children to sexualised content constitutes a form of grooming,' the petition warns. 'It is well-known that children will often copy what they see on the screen.'

The ASA previously stated the advert does not break any rules, with a spokesperson for the authority telling LGBT website *Pink News* that it will not be taking any further action on complaints against the advert.

To sign the petition, see: <https://citizengo.org/en-gb/fm/200615-remove-gay-creme-eggs-advert>

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Rubens' autobiographical masterpieces to be displayed as painter always wanted

Nick Benson

A 400-year-old masterpiece by devout Catholic painter Peter Paul Rubens is going on display following extensive conservation work by The National Gallery.

Dating from around 1636, *An Autumn Landscape with a View of Het Steen in the Early Morning*, was in the Flemish artist's possession when he died in 1640, together with its companion, *The Rainbow Landscape*.

Both paintings will soon be reunited this spring, at the Wallace Collection, after more than 200 years apart.

Although originally intended as a pair, these panoramic masterpieces parted ways upon arrival in London in 1803, with one entering the National Gallery Collection and the other going to the Wallace Collection.

The landscape paintings depict Rubens' beloved manor home and estate, Het Steen, in Antwerp, which was bought the year before he made the two pictures; a purchase made possible due to the wealth and status he had gained as a hugely successful artist and diplomat.

The National Gallery said it is clear that both paintings were "deeply personal" to Rubens, noting that he chose to live alongside them and display them in his own home. It said it is "only fitting that they are to be reunited after over two centuries apart, as the artist intended".

"Although his religious commissions and grand portraits were com-

mercially successful, we know that landscape painting was a subject close to Rubens' heart, one that brought him great joy," the Gallery said.

Experts said the results of the conservation work on *Het Steen* had "so far proven revelatory".

Layers of aged, discoloured varnish – some over 75-years-old – have been removed to reveal the "depth and vibrancy" of the original colours.

Experts noted how "now even the smallest details, like the bits of pure white, dotted to suggest the bubbling of a brook as it turns a corner, are visible to the naked eye".

Repairs were also made to the 400-year-old oak and poplar panels on which the work was painted, which were severely damaged as a result of severe frosts in London in 1947.

Experts said the construction of the panel provides an important clue to understanding the intended audience of the picture. "We can be reasonably sure Rubens made these pictures for his own delight because of these small and unevenly shaped panels, patched together in a fashion that would be unacceptable to a collector," they said.

Larry Keith, the National Gallery's Head of Conservation and Keeper said: "It was quite a special painting because it was painted for his own pleasure. Everything you see here is him, it is wholly autograph...taking off the varnish is quite revelatory, allowing you to see an artist really working for himself at the peak of his powers in a completely free and personal way."

Rubens is widely known for his paintings of Biblical scenes, including *The Massacre of the Innocents*; *The Descent from the Cross*; and *The Assumption of the Virgin Mary*.

Het Steen will be unveiled at the Wallace Collection's exhibition *Rubens: Reuniting the Great Landscapes*, from 21st April to 15th August.



An Autumn Landscape with a View of Het Steen in the Early Morning



The Rainbow Landscape

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Friendly fire victim's medals reunited

A medal awarded to a British soldier killed in Dublin during the Easter Rising after he was mistaken for a Sinn Féin spy has sold at auction for £1,300.

The 1914-15 Star plus copied research was being sold by a private collector and was expected to fetch £400-500.

Lieutenant Basil Worswick died on 29th April 1916 at the Guinness Brewery in Dublin after he was confronted by a guard.

He served with the King Edward's Horse, a cavalry regiment of the British Army, and was sent with the 2nd Battalion to Ireland, following the outbreak of the Easter Rising, to help quell the disturbance in the city.

On the night of 28th-29th April, a detachment of the Dublin Fusiliers

was stationed at the malt house of the brewery.

When the night clerk of the brewery, accompanied by Lieutenant Lucas of the King Edward's Horse, was making his nightly round of the brewery buildings, he was challenged by the "very nervous and jumpy" guard of Royal Dubliners, auction house Dix Noonan Webb said.

Mistaken for Sinn Feiners trying to infiltrate the brewery premises, the guard shot both the night clerk and Lt Lucas dead. Lt Worswick, in the next picket along, heard the commotion and went to the malt house.

"Challenged and searched by a sergeant of the Dublin Fusiliers, he rushed at him, knocked the man down," said Dix Noonan Webb.

"The guard, seeing this, and believing Worswick also to be a Sinn Féin spy, killed him instantly."

Lt Worswick was buried in the grounds of Dublin Castle; his body was exhumed in 1963 and he is now buried in Grangegorman Military cemetery, Co. Dublin.

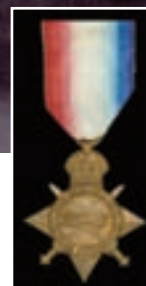
He is also commemorated on the Glasnevin Memorial.

Christopher Mellor-Hill, of Dix Noonan Webb, said: "The medal attracted a lot of interest."

"It was bought by a collector who had owned Lt Worswick's other two World War I medals for over 30 years and had been looking for his missing 1914-15 Star all this time, so we are very pleased to have been able to reunite them at long last!"



Lieutenant Basil Worswick and his 1914-15 Star
Photos: Dix Noonan Webb.



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IN BRIEF

Vatican wants to widen the 'we' to include refugees

For the next World Day of Migrants and Refugees, Pope Francis wants Catholics to focus on greater communion and unity among all people.

The Vatican celebration of the World Day of Migrants and Refugees 2021 will be on 26th September and the pope's choice for a theme is: *"Toward an ever wider 'we,'"* said the Migrants and Refugees Section of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development.

The theme will be divided into six sub-themes and emphasises "the importance of being attentive to the entire human family through an inclusive church that reaches out and is capable of creating communion in diversity."

The world day will also focus on the "care of our common home, which translates into care of our common family" and becoming more open and welcoming to others, the Vatican said.

To prepare for the World Day of Migrants and Refugees, the dicastery said it would develop resources and a communication campaign to support the event.

The campaign includes "monthly multimedia aids, information material and reflections by theologians and experts that expand upon the theme and sub-themes chosen by the Holy Father," the statement said.

Iraq trip hit by Covid blow

Pope Francis' trip to Iraq this weekend got off to a bad start before it had even begun when the man tasked with being his guide for the four days tested positive to Covid-19.

Archbishop Mitja Leskovar, the papal nuncio to Iraq, told reporters on 28th February that he was experiencing light symptoms and was in self-isolation. The pope was scheduled to stay at the nunciature during his visit, so all staff had been moved as a precaution and the residence has been thoroughly sanitised.

The National News also reported that Ahmed Al Safi, an aide to Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, the Shi'ite leader Pope Francis is scheduled to meet on 6th March, had also tested positive.

Elderly specialist to look after pope

Pope Francis, 84, has chosen a specialist in internal medicine and gerontology to be his new personal physician.

Dr. Roberto Bernabei, 69, is a professor of internal medicine at the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart and director of the Department of Ageing, Orthopedics and Rehabilitative Medicine at Rome's Gemelli hospital.

For Lent, read the Gospel, fast from gossip, says pope

Carol Glatz

People should fast from gossiping and spreading hearsay as part of their Lenten journey, Pope Francis said.

"For Lent this year, I will not speak ill of others, I will not gossip and all of us can do this, everyone. This is a wonderful kind of fasting," the pope said after praying the Sunday Angelus last weekend in the Vatican.

Greeting visitors in St Peter's Square, the pope said his advice for Lent included adding a different kind of fasting "that won't make you feel hungry: fasting from spreading rumors and gossiping."

"And don't forget that it will also be helpful to read a verse from the Gospel every day," he said, urging people to have on hand a pocket-size edition to read whenever possible, even if it is just a random verse.

"This will open your heart to the Lord," he added.

The pope also led a moment of prayer for the more than 300 girls who were kidnapped by unidentified gunmen in Jangebe in north-western Nigeria.

Adding his voice to statements made by Nigeria's bishops, the pope condemned the "vile kidnapping of 317 girls, taken away from their school," and he prayed for them and their families, hoping for their safe return home.

Three days later, it was revealed that the girls had been released from captivity unharmed – a development that "gladdened my heart," the Governor of Zamfara state, Bello Matawalle, wrote on Twitter.

He said the released "followed the scaling of several hurdles laid against our efforts," he added.



Crowds gather in St Peter's Square to hear the pope say the Angelus last weekend

He thanked all those around the world – "including His Holiness the Pope" – for bringing the girls' plight to a wider audience.

The pope also marked Rare Disease Day, held on 28th February to raise awareness and improve advocacy and access to treatment. He thanked all those involved in medical research for diagnosing and coming up with treatments for rare diseases, and he encouraged support networks and associations so people do not feel alone and can share experience and advice.

"Let us pray for all people who have a rare disease," he said, especially for children who suffer.

In his main address, he reflected on the day's Gospel reading (Mk 9:2-10) about Peter, James and John witnessing the transfiguration of Jesus on the mountain and their subsequent descent back down to the valley.

The pope said pausing with the Lord on the mountain "is a call to remember – especially when we pass through a difficult trial – that the Lord is risen and does not permit darkness

to have the last word."

However, he added, "we cannot remain on the mountain and enjoy the beauty of this encounter by ourselves. Jesus himself brings us back to the valley, amid our brothers and sisters and into daily life."

People must take that light that comes from their encounter with Christ "and make it shine everywhere. Igniting little lights in people's hearts; being little lamps of the Gospel that bear a bit of love and hope: this is the mission of a Christian," he said.

Vatican backs appeal to loosen rules on vaccines

The Vatican has thrown its support behind an effort by India, South Africa and a host of developing nations to loosen international patent protections and speed up sub-licensing agreements for the production of Covid-19 vaccines, pharmaceuticals and personal protective equipment.

"Despite the billions of taxpayer dollars invested in R&D (research and development), and announcements that Covid-19 vaccines should be considered a public good, no government has openly made such a public commitment," Archbishop Ivan Jurkovic said.

The archbishop, who is the Vatican representative to UN agencies in Geneva, made his comments to a meeting of the World Trade Organization's Council for Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights.

"Most countries of the world are experiencing delays in vaccine rollout programmes," the archbishop said. "Such situations have resulted from insufficient product manufacturing

and the consequent lack of availability of the required number of vaccine doses.

"On the other hand, in many countries, a large number of manufacturing facilities, with proven capacity to produce safe and effective vaccines, are unable to utilise those capacities because of the patents and other intellectual-property protections."

The international TRIPS (Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights) agreement, he said, has proven to be too cumbersome to facilitate sub-licensing.

In addition, he said, the agreement's "flexibilities allow limited policy space for public health, but they never were designed to address a global health crisis, such as the one we are experiencing at present."

"Granting a waiver from the implementation, application and enforcement of specified sections of the agreement" in order to prevent, contain or treat Covid-19 "would be a strong signal demonstrating real commitment



A man checks documents of a woman outside a vaccination centre in New Delhi
Photo: Adnan Abidi, Reuters

and engagement and thus moving from declaration to action in favour of the entire human family," Archbishop Jurkovic said.

Ten developing countries have launched a campaign to loosen patent protections to promote innovation by rewarding companies that invest

in research and development.

"Never has there been a weaker case for the granting of monopolies," said the response, which is led by Bolivia and nine other nations.

"Governments have been funding the development of Covid drugs and vaccines, and no company is able to meet the global demand."

"Governments must attach strings to any public money given for Covid-19 medical tools to guarantee that, if they prove safe and effective, they are available to everyone," the response added. "Some conditions had been set on companies, but none of it goes far enough to ensure that intellectual-property rights assigned to companies benefiting from state cash do not abuse such rights down the line."

The Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Union and Caritas Europe has already demanded that the EU opens up its vaccine stocks to poorer countries and allows for a greater sharing of vaccine knowledge around the world.

Psychiatrist helped pope handle anxiety

Pope Francis has told an Argentinian newspaper that he saw a psychiatrist when he was a young priest over problems with anxiety – and he found the experience “very helpful.”

The pope told *La Nacion* that today he deals with moments of anxiety by listening to music, particularly Bach.

Pope Francis said he turned to therapy when he served as the Jesuit provincial during Argentina's right-wing dictatorship.

“Being provincial in the terrible days of the dictatorship, in which I had to take people in hiding to get them out of the country and thus save their lives, I had to handle situations that I did not know how to deal with,” Francis said.

During this time, he said that he consulted a psychiatrist once a week for about six months.

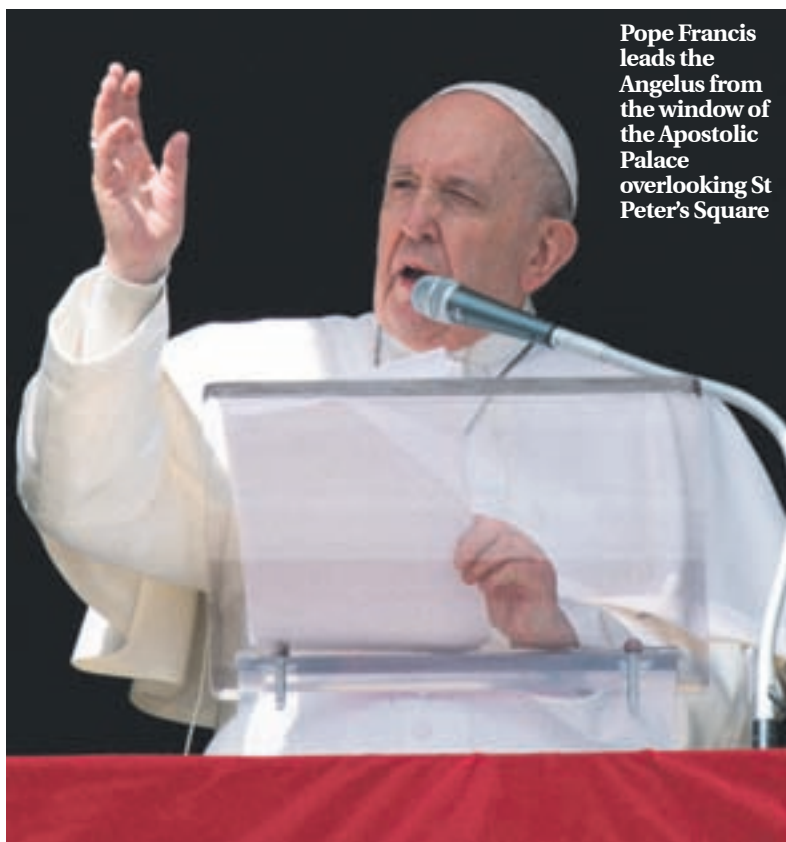
“Throughout those six months, she helped me position myself in terms of a way to handle the fears of that time. Imagine what it was like to take a person hidden in the car – only covered by a blanket – and go through military checkpoints. The tension it generated in me was enormous,” Pope Francis said.

“The psychiatrist also helped me to locate myself and learn to manage my anxiety and avoid being rushed when making decisions. The advice and observations that she gave me was very helpful. ... Her teachings are still very useful to me today.”

Pope Francis said that his anxiety has been “tamed,” compared to what he experienced when he was younger, which he described as “anxious neurosis” and “wanting to do everything now.”

He has learned different ways of dealing with anxieties. “You have to know how to brake,” he said. “When I am faced with a situation or I have to face a problem that causes me anxiety, I cut it short.”

“I have different methods of doing it. One of them is listening to Bach. It



Pope Francis leads the Angelus from the window of the Apostolic Palace overlooking St Peter's Square

calms me down and helps me analyse problems. Over the years I have managed to put a barrier to the entrance of anxiety in my spirit. It would be dangerous and harmful for me to make decisions under a state of anxiety,” the pope said.

It is important for priests to have an understanding of psychology for their pastoral ministry, the pope added. “I’m convinced that every priest must know human psychology.”

In the interview, Pope Francis also talked about the origin of his lung condition, which was brought on by a flu epidemic when he was a 21-year-old seminarian.

“It was 1957. I was in my second year of seminary ... That winter there was a strong flu epidemic that hit

many of the seminarians. I was among them. But my case evolved in a more torpid way. Upon viewing the X-rays, the specialist found three cysts in the upper lobe of the right lung. There was also a bilateral pleural effusion that caused me pain and shortness of breath,” he said.

An operation removed part of the affected lobe, he said, but he never felt any limitation in his activities afterwards.

Pope Francis pointed out that “doctors explained to me that the right lung expanded and covered the entire ipsilateral hemithorax. The expansion has been so complete that, if he is not advised of the history, only a first-rate pulmonologist can detect the lack of the excised lobe.”

Catholic bishop: I’m happy giving Holy Communion to Protestants

The president of the German Catholic bishops’ conference has said he would continue to give Holy Communion to Protestants who ask for it.

Bishop Georg Bätzing told journalists at a press conference that it was necessary to respect the “personal decision of conscience” of those seeking to receive Communion.

Bätzing was responding to a question about a controversial proposal for a ‘Eucharistic meal fellowship’ between Catholics and Protestants, made by the Ecumenical Study Group of Protestant and Catholic theologians, the ÖAK, in a document called *Together at the Lord’s Table*.

Asked how he would respond if a Protestant came to him seeking the

Eucharist, he told reporters: “I have no problems with it and I see myself in line with papal documents.”

The 59-year-old bishop added that this was already a “practice” in Germany “every Sunday” and that priests in his diocese of Limburg would not face negative consequences if a case were reported to him.

One should not “simply invite everyone,” he said. But while a general invitation to receive the Eucharist was not permitted, it was important to show “respect for the personal decision of conscience of the individual” seeking Communion. “I do not deny Holy Communion to a Protestant if he asks for it,” he said.


The ÖAK was established in 1946

to strengthen ecumenical ties between Germany’s Catholic bishops and the Evangelical Church in Germany, which represents 20 Protestant groups.

The ÖAK idea has raised concerns at the Vatican, which has emphasised that significant differences remained between Protestants and Catholics over the Eucharist. These “rule out reciprocal participation in the Lord’s Supper and the Eucharist,” it said.


The Vatican also cautioned against any steps towards intercommunion between Catholics and the EKD.

Cardinal Kurt Koch, prefect of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, has also expressed “serious misgivings” about the “Eucharistic meal fellowship” proposal.



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*Pope Francis said:
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World News

Save the Earth, save ourselves

Fr Shay Cullen



One of the most famous and committed protectors of the natural world and defender of the planet is Sir David Attenborough. He gave a speech to the UN this week, telling them how climate change was disrupting our world as temperatures rose. There is no going back; we are near a point of no return. But we can stop it rising higher.

Natural disasters are endemic, turning millions into victims of droughts while others struggle to cope with flooding. Devastating fires drive thousands from their homes and killed millions of animals. Wildlife is fast disappearing. Climate refugees are becoming the greatest threat as millions are displaced and abandon their shacks, hunger and poverty and head for the rich nations and besiege their borders, begging for help and work. Their numbers will increase.

The evidence is everywhere. As the planet warms so vast tracts of marshlands in Siberia and the Arctic Circle are melting, releasing billions of tons of previously trapped methane into the atmosphere. This will add to the blanket of gas that is insulating the planet and preventing the heat from escaping. Weather is becoming harsher: winters are colder and more prolonged, as happened this year in the USA, where people as far south as Texas died from the cold.

Many politicians and big firms refuse to admit the truth of global warming because of corporate greed. David Attenborough tried to convince the Security Council of this fact.

It sounds all gloom and doom, it is, and we have to take serious action to stop it. The deadline is a tipping point of global temperature that when reached could make the warming irreversible; perhaps it already is. But we can reverse the worst of the trend. By supporting environmental campaigns and electing 'green' politicians we can push governments and corporate tycoons to stop building more coal plants and turn to non-destructive and renewable ways of making electricity such as geothermal, solar and wind power. We can all be environmentalists. We can change our communities to be more climate friendly by protecting our environment, speaking out against logging, planting trees, recycling, and establishing organic food gardens to feed ourselves and eat less meat. This is the challenge for our future and that of our families and the next generation. Each of us can find a way to be involved in saving the environment.

Visit www.preda.org, and on Facebook, Preda Foundation.

Cardinal, Sister beg for peace in Myanmar



Thousands march through Myanmar's former capital of Yangon in support of imprisoned leader Aung San Suu Kyi

Rob Beswick

Cardinal Charles Bo of Yangon has called for patience and tolerance after anti-coup protests resulted in deadly clashes with Myanmar security forces.

Last weekend saw the bloodiest days since the military coup at the start of February, with at least 18 confirmed dead after shots were fired into crowds demanding the release of former Prime Minister Aung San Suu Kyi and other politicians.

In one astonishing event, troops about to fire on demonstrators were stopped by a member of the Sisters of St Francis Xavier. Eye witnesses reported that Sr Ann Nu Thawng got on her knees in front of soldiers, raised her hands toward Heaven and implored: "Don't shoot, don't kill the innocent. If you want, hit me." Her actions shocked the troops who did not shoot and stopped their advance.

"Today, the riot has been severe nationwide," said a tweet on @Cardinal-MaungBo. "The police are arresting, beating and even shooting at the people. With (eyes) full of tears, Sr. Ann Nu Thawng begs & halts the police to stop arresting the protesters."

In a homily at Mass Cardinal Bo said the streets of Myanmar have seen too much pain, suffering and resistance, and called on the faithful "to believe in the power of love and reconciliation."

"We are all sons and daughters of the same land and we need to exercise patience and tolerance."

"If you want to be a leader, you must serve. Service is the greatest power, not guns. Make peace our destiny, not conflict. Arms are useless."



A diver holds a placard during an underwater protest near Ngwe Saung, Myanmar, in this picture obtained from social media.

Rearm ourselves with reconciliation and dialogue."

Hundreds of Catholics led by priests and nuns marched through Mandalay saying the rosary and calling for a peaceful solution to the crisis, while across the country the second Sunday of Lent saw violence erupt in at least five cities when police and soldiers opened fire on crowds protesting military rule.

UN observers confirmed deaths had occurred, with a spokesman admitting that the picture was still so confusing "that the final death toll could be much higher than the numbers we know of."

The intensive crackdown has drawn strong condemnation from the United Nations, the UK, European Union and other countries.

Ravina Shamdasani, UN spokeswoman, said: "We strongly condemn the escalating violence against protests in Myanmar and call on the military to immediately halt the use of force against peaceful protesters."

Tom Andrews, the UN special rapporteur on human rights in Myanmar,

said it was clear the junta's assault would continue, so the international community needed to ratchet up its response. "Words of condemnation are welcome but insufficient. We must act," he said.

Andrews proposed a global arms embargo, more sanctions from more countries, sanctions on the military's businesses and a UN Security Council referral to the International Criminal Court. The UK announced sanctions on key figures in the Government a week ago.

Myanmar's envoy to the UN has appealed for international action to help reverse the coup. Kyaw Moe Tun begged the UN Security Council to use "any means necessary to rescue the people of Myanmar and hold the military to account."

The violence began after the army seized power, arresting Aung San Suu Kyi on charges alleging fraud in the November 2020 election. Her National League for Democracy party had won the vote by a landslide, easily defeating candidates known to have army support.

Catholics bid for new Iran peace deal

A consortium of Catholic organisations in the United States have written to President Joe Biden, urging him to rejoin the Iran nuclear deal in an effort to promote peace and security.

They also called on the US to lift economic sanctions against the Iranian government in an effort to bring its leaders back to the negotiating table as a demonstration of 'good faith'.

Former President Donald Trump unilaterally withdrew the US from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, or JCPOA, in 2018, saying it was insufficient in blocking Iran from developing nuclear weapons. The agreement was negotiated with Iran by China, France, Russia, the UK, Germany and the US, in a bid to stop it from obtaining the materials needed to build and launch a nuclear weapon.

Since its withdrawal, the US has reimposed numerous economic sanctions on Iran that had been lifted under the agreement.

But this policy has failed, the groups said, as Iran has stepped up its nuclear weapons development programme since the collapse of the JCPOA. A better route would be to remove sanctions 'with clear conditions attached.'

"The Iran deal is a model of multi-lateral dialogue and co-operation," the letter added. "We support efforts, together with our European allies, to renew negotiations with Iran."

The letter cited long-standing support for the JCPOA from Pope Francis, who has repeatedly called for dialogue among the parties to achieve lasting peace and understanding.

The JCPOA can be the starting point for future negotiations with Iran on issues of concern, 'but the United States must act first to rebuild trust'.

"Diplomacy is the only proven path to addressing concerns about Iran's ballistic missile programme, its sponsorship of terrorism and its proxy wars in the Middle East," it added.

Signatories to the letter included the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns, the Leadership Conference of Women Religious, Franciscan Action Network, Pax Christi USA and VIVAT International, which represents 25,000 religious and is based at the UN.

Tensions in the Middle East reached new heights last weekend after Israel blamed an attack on one of its cargo ships in the Gulf of Oman on Iran. The car carrier *Helios Ray* was struck by a mine while 60 miles off the coast of Oman last weekend. Israel immediately blamed Iranian-backed militia for the attack, and launched rocket attacks on Iranian assets in Syria in reprisal.

Pope mourns after Italy's ambassador murdered in Congo

Pope Francis has joined Italy in mourning the murders of the country's ambassador to Congo and an Italian officer in his security detail, described them as "servants of peace and law."

Ambassador Luca Attanasio, 43, and 30-year-old military police officer Vittorio Iacovacci died after

being shot in an ambush in North Kivu as they were traveling in a UN convoy. Their driver, local man Mustapha Milambo, also died.

Attanasio, who had been ambassador to Congo since 2017, leaves a wife and three children. Iacovacci was engaged.

Pope Francis offered Italian

President Sergio Mattarella his 'heartfelt condolences' and praised Attanasio as 'a person of outstanding human and Christian qualities,' who was working to bring peace to Congo.

Congolese officials said the attack was launched with the intention of taking hostages for ransom.



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NJPN Comment

Let us dream of a different world

Celia Capstick

In his recent book *Let us Dream*, Pope Francis set out a roadmap: 'a path to a better future'.

In conversation with Austen Ivereigh, he muses on how the Coronavirus pandemic can lead to transformation. It affects most of the world and is the most visible sign of the many crises we face today: climate change, wars, refugees fleeing poverty and hunger, and destruction of the natural world. The Bible talks of such trials as passing through fire. We are all tested in life and, "it is how we grow."

From his own life the pope describes how three crises changed him dramatically, and after the pandemic we must all emerge better. As Christians we must put others first, and any blueprint for change, he says, must "serve the poor and marginalised, just as Jesus did."

In the section entitled *A Time to Choose* the pope says that a sign of hope in this crisis is the leading role of women. Women have been some of the hardest hit by the pandemic – as health care workers or domestic workers on low pay – but women are also some of the most resilient. He notes women prime ministers globally who have reacted with empathy. He refers to the strength of women in the Gospel who followed Jesus to his death and were the first witnesses to the Resurrection. He wonders: 'Could it be that in this crisis, the perspective that women bring is what the world needs at this time to meet the coming challenges?'

The pope rejects the old economic model of maximisation of profits, using the measurement of GDP (Gross Domestic Product). He feels this model plunders our planet, creates huge disparities of wealth and is ultimately unsustainable. Women economists, he suggests, like Kate Raworth, who offers an alternative model called 'Doughnut Economics', start from a basis of protecting people and the natural world through a way of life which is regenerative and distributive. At its heart is a concern that all humanity has access to land, lodging and labour, themes of Catholic social teaching. Pope Francis has appointed Kate and two other UK women economists to the Vatican Secretariat for the Economy.

March 5th is Women's World day of Prayer; March 8th is International Women's day. Let us pray that the world will listen to such women and to Pope Francis, so that we emerge from the pandemic to a new sustainable and compassionate way of living.

Celia Capstick is on the National Board of Catholic Women's Social Responsibility Committee.

Migrants occupy church as Belgium ignores their plight

Around 150 migrants have occupied a Catholic church in the centre of Brussels, and are refusing to leave until they have been granted legal status by the Government.

The migrants, including families with children, laid sleeping bags and blankets on the stone floor of the Beguinage church in central Brussels and have slept there for several nights. The church overlooks the Place Sainte-Catherine.

Laurence Vanpaeschen, a member of the Belgian refugee rights NGO, Ciré, said other groups of migrants were threatening to occupy other churches in protest about the way they are treated by the authorities.

The Beguinage church is often a focal point of protest, and has been occupied by migrants several times in the past 20 years, Vanpaeschen said. The priest was "very supportive" of the action.

The migrants believe the occupation is a stronger statement than demonstrating on the street, Vanpaeschen explained. "A lot of them have been living in Belgium for a long time," she said. "They want access to housing, health and education. And they want to have the right to work."

One of the migrants involved in the occupation told the Brussels news site BX1: "We want to have the chance to work, for example in sectors where there is a shortage of labour. We are fed up with this life."



Refugees have occupied the Beguinage church overlooking Brussels' Place Saint Catherine

The migrants claim their demands for justice are being ignored by the Government, particularly on the issue of regularising their legal status. "There has just been total silence," their spokeswoman said, while our situation "gets worse and worse."

"Many are forced to work on the black market where they are exploited," Vanpaeschen added. Housing is so expensive many have to live with others, in cramped conditions.

Another big worry is the pandemic. The migrants believe they are running

greater health risks by living in crowded accommodation, "and if you don't have papers you have to pay for a Covid test yourself, but they don't have any money." Without access to legal status, "they do not think they will get a vaccine either."

WHO praise as first COVAX delivery made

The Director-General of the World Health Organisation has welcomed the first deliveries of vaccines through the COVAX programme, saying they give the whole world a chance to beat Covid-19.

Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire immediately began vaccinating health workers against the virus with their supplies. The two nations hope to welcome a further 11 million doses this week.

Between now and the end of May, 237 million doses of vaccines will be allocated to 142 participating economies in COVAX, WHO said.

The timing of the deliveries was crucial, with WHO reporting that the number of new cases globally had risen for the first time in seven weeks, suggesting a new wave of infections was beginning.

Four of WHO's six regions: the Americas, Europe, South East Asia and the Eastern Mediterranean said infections were up.

Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said it was "encouraging to see health workers in lower-income countries starting to be vaccinated, but it's regrettable that this comes almost three months after some of the wealthiest countries started their vaccination campaigns." And in an added barb against wealthier western nations he said it was "particularly regrettable

that some countries continue to prioritise vaccinating younger, healthier adults at lower risk of disease in their own populations ahead of health workers and older people elsewhere."

He stressed that countries "are not in a race with each other, this is a common race against the virus."

"We're not asking countries to put their own people at risk," Dr Ghebreyesus added. "We're asking all countries to be part of a global effort to suppress the virus everywhere."

WHO said its vision was for every

country to start its vaccination programme within the first 100 days of this year, but this would only be possible through intense support and cooperation of all partners.

Dr Ghebreyesus also reminded the world that vaccines alone would not keep them safe, saying that is was "disappointing" that some nations were dropping restrictions against virus circulation.

"Even as vaccines continue to roll out, we urge all governments and individuals to remember that vaccines

alone will not keep you safe.

"In the past week, the number of reported cases of Covid-19 increased for the first time in seven weeks. This is disappointing, but not surprising.

"Some of the rise appears to be due to relaxing of public health measures, continued circulation of variants, and people letting down their guard. Basic public health measures must remain the foundation of the response.

"For public health authorities, that means testing, contact tracing, isolation, supported quarantine and quality care.

"For individuals, it means avoiding crowds, physical distancing, hand hygiene, masks and ventilation."

His remarks came as the worldwide death toll of the pandemic soared to nearly 2.6 million.

Overall there have been 114 million cases.

Significant concern has been voiced over the situation in Brazil, where well over 1,000 deaths are being recorded a day and the cumulative death total has reached 255,000. Three-quarters of the country's hospitals are saying that their ICU beds are full, and medical experts believe the country should brace itself for over 2,000 deaths a day within the next couple of weeks, such is the pressure on the health system.



The first consignment of Covid vaccines arrives in Ghana



Chris
McDonnell

A bowl
of rice - p23



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The enchanting
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A CATHOLIC UNIVERSE SUPPLEMENT

With Lebanon on verge of collapse, thousands rally to support cardinal

Doreen Abi Raad

Thousands of Lebanese rallied last Saturday to show their support for the positions of Cardinal Bechara Rai as the country teeters on the verge of collapse from multiple crises.

The rally was at Bkerke, the seat of the Maronite Catholic Church, north of Beirut. Speaking from a window of the patriarchate, Cardinal Rai, Maronite patriarch, told the crowd: "You have come from all over Lebanon, of all ages, despite the dangers of the coronavirus, to support two proposals, that of neutrality and that of an international conference for Lebanon under the auspices of the UN. You have come to ask for the salvation of Lebanon.

"Long live Lebanon, united and unified, actively and positively neutral, sovereign and independent, free and strong, advocating coexistence and tolerance," Cardinal Rai said.

Muslims and Druze were among those who attended, including Sunni, Shiite and Druze sheikhs.

"Failure to respect neutrality is the sole cause of all the crises and wars that the country has gone through," the cardinal stressed.

"Do not remain silent in the face of corruption. Do not tolerate the theft of your money, the fluid borders, the failure of the political class,

the chaos in the investigation into the Beirut port explosion, or the imprisonment of the innocent. Do not tolerate the failure in forming a government and implementing reforms," he said.

Archbishop Paul Nabil El-Sayah,

patriarchal vicar general for foreign affairs at Bkerke, who stood beside Cardinal Rai during his speech, told *Catholic News Service*: "Lebanon has never been in such a situation throughout its modern history. This is why the patriarch is taking such

drastic measures."

The outpouring of Lebanese people, specifically to express their solidarity with Cardinal Rai, reflects the urgency regarding Lebanon's future. More than half of the Lebanese people now live below the poverty line, the unemployment rate exceeds 50 per cent and the Lebanese currency has lost 80 per cent of its value in less than a year.

Lebanon has been without a government since the previous one resigned last August, following explosions at the Beirut port that killed more than 200 people, injured thousands and left 300,000 people homeless. Political rifts have held up the formation process of a new government.

Cardinal Rai has repeatedly admonished Lebanon's politicians for their negligence. In his speech, he said they "have not even had the audacity to sit down at the same table to resolve the current problem."

He said Lebanon is "facing a coup situation in every sense of the word on the various fields of public life, a coup against the Lebanese society."

He underlined that the international conference he advocates aims to "affirm the stability and identity of Lebanon, the sovereignty of its borders, and its attachment to freedom, equality and neutrality."

Iranian-backed Hezbollah and some other political parties in Lebanon have been critical of Cardinal Rai's proposal for an international conference, with Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah saying it would open the door to foreign interference in Lebanon.

Without mentioning Hezbollah directly, Cardinal Rai alluded to the Shiite political and military group and its weapons in his speech: "There is no state with two powers within it, nor with two armies or two peoples. Any tampering with these constants threatens the unity of the state."

The cardinal also voiced rejection of any attempt to naturalise Palestinian refugees in Lebanon and pressed for Syrian refugees to be returned to their country.

On top its population of around 4.5 million, Lebanon has absorbed approximately 1.5 million Syrian refugees and more than 400,000 Palestinian refugees, whose presence stems from the creation of Israel in 1948.

"I fully understand your screams and anger and understand your uprising and revolution," Cardinal Rai said in his speech, referring to the mass protest movement that began in October 2019, which was later interrupted by the coronavirus pandemic.



Cardinal Bechara Rai, Maronite patriarch, addresses thousands of Lebanese at Bkerke, north of Beirut, on 27th February, as Lebanon teeters on the verge of collapse. "Do not tolerate the failure in forming a government and implementing reforms," he told them.

(Catholic News Service photo/Mychel Akl, courtesy Maronite Patriarchate)

Bible reading boosts mental well-being among Christians, says survey

Reading the Bible has had a positive effect on people's "mental well-being" during the pandemic, according to a Christian Research survey.

The survey also found that respondents were reading the Bible more and turning to Bible-related videos more during the

pandemic.

The survey, carried out on behalf of the Bible Society, posed a number of questions to 1,000 people in the UK who identified themselves as Christians and who had attended church at least once a month before restrictions aimed at curbing the pandemic. The

questions were asked in December, and the results were published online by the Bible Society earlier this week.

Forty-two per cent of respondents reported that reading the Bible increased a "sense of hope in God during the crisis, rising to nearly half (49 per cent) among

45- to 54-year-olds," the report by the Bible Society said.

"Some 28 per cent said that reading the Bible had increased their confidence in the future," while 63 per cent said they felt their level of confidence remained the same, rather than dropping, it said.

It said 23 per cent of those surveyed said the Bible "had increased their mental well-being, including 47 per cent of 24- to 34-year-olds," and 33 per cent of 16- to 24-year-olds reported that reading the Bible had helped them "feel less lonely."

The report said 35 per cent of survey respondents were reading the Bible more during the pandemic with the biggest increase among 25- to 34-year-olds in which

"53 per cent were reading the Bible more often."

"A quarter of those asked, said that they were reading the Bible 'multiple times a day' and half said that they were reading the Bible on a daily basis," the Bible Society said.

It also found that 25 per cent of the 25- to 34-year-olds in the survey said they had begun reading the Bible during the pandemic.

While many continue to turn to print editions of the Bible, 23 per cent reported using "a Bible-reading app, 30 per cent are now listening to the Bible" and 59 per cent of those surveyed said that "they now watched more Bible-related videos or had started watching them."



Limburg Bishop Georg Bätzing, president of the German bishops' conference, seated, attends a video conference of a two-day virtual meeting in Bonn on 23rd February. (inset) Beate Gilles, the newly appointed general secretary of the German bishops' conference, became the first noncleric and woman to head the bishops' secretariat. She will take up her post on 1st July. (CNS photos/Sascha Steinback pool via KNA)

Embattled German bishops pick woman theologian as top Catholic administrator

The German bishops' conference elected a woman as general secretary during a virtual assembly that turned into a crisis meeting focused on the Church's handling of sex abuse. **Anli Serfontein** reports

Beate Gilles, a 50-year-old theologian, became the first non-cleric and woman to head the bishops' secretariat. She will take up her post on 1st July.

"Last year, there was still the debate of whether a woman could hold such an office here. Now we know it is possible," she said on 23rd February at the news conference after her election.

Limburg Bishop Georg Bätzing, president of the bishops' conference, said the appointment was a strong signal "that the bishops are honouring their agreement to promote women in leading positions."

Yet Gilles' election could not distract from the fact that the Catholic Church in Germany is under pressure and at a critical point. It has fallen into disrepute among its members after a litany of accusations of inadequate investigations into and cover-ups of past sexual abuse.

"As long as there is no honest, open and complete reappraisal of sexual abuse in all German dioceses set at a high scientific level and with the same standards for all, the reform efforts ... will come to nothing," said a statement from the Catholic Lay Alliance, representing seven lay organisations.

At the centre of the storm is Cologne Cardinal Rainer Maria Woelki. After he commissioned a report to clear up past sexual abuse cases, especially how they were handled, in the Archdiocese of Cologne, he refused to make it public, saying it contained deficiencies. He ordered a new report, scheduled to be published on 18th March. Parish councils, priests and most recently the diocesan council have criticised the cardinal for his handling of the abuse investigation.

While other dioceses are also dealing with abuse allegations, Cardinal Woelki is seen as a symbol for the

cover-up in the Catholic Church, as more and more German Catholics are turning their backs on the Church. Others, like the lay alliance, are calling for fundamental changes.

In Germany, Church affiliations are registered with the government, which collects Church tax on behalf of the churches. This normally amounts to five to eight per cent of a Church member's income.

On 19th February, the Cologne District Court's online appointment booking website for people leaving the Church crashed after additional dates and time slots for March and April became available for appointments, the court told the *German News Agency*.

At a news conference on 25th February, Bishop Bätzing admitted that people leaving the Church would eventually affect Church finances. He also admitted that troubles in the Cologne Archdiocese overshadowed

the spring plenary.

He reiterated that he has openly called Cardinal Woelki's crisis management "a disaster. I have advised him to pursue a different course." He said the bishops' conference cannot make any decision on Cardinal Woelki's future; only the apostolic nuncio can.

In his formal, final 17-page statement after the plenary, Bishop Bätzing addressed the fact that public opinion at the moment focuses on the Archdiocese of Cologne.

"I would like to clarify: Yes, there are many people leaving the Church, also because of the image that the Church is currently projecting. And certainly there are many things that need to be clarified in the Archdiocese of Cologne. But to focus solely on the Archbishop of Cologne would be too shortsighted. On the contrary: all bishops of all 27 dioceses bear a responsibility for the situation, and

we all have to face the criticism."

He said much progress has been made in the last decade, since the first cases of sexual abuse in the German Catholic Church became public in 2010, "but of course there is still a lot to do. The issue is in no way closed, nor will it ever be with a view to prevention. However, I reject the accusation that the bishops have been silent or have done nothing for years."

During the meeting, the bishops also discussed the Synodal Path, which is debating the issues of power, sexual morality, priestly life and the role of women in the Church. It also heard a report from an ecumenical working group on shared Communion and discussed the dire situation of refugees on the EU borders. Bishop Bätzing asked EU Governments to get involved in a situation that he described as a blot on the European Union.

Bishops defend property after Spain claims irregularities in registration

Spain's Catholic bishops defended their church's property rights, after the government accused the Church of improperly claiming ownership of thousands of buildings and parcels of land.

"The Church has registered goods which Catholic people have created and entrusted to it over centuries, so it could carry out its work of proclaiming the Gospel, celebrating the faith and exercising charity," said a statement on the bishops' conference website. "It has also registered assets received through bequests and inheritances, which have been used, one way or another, for the same purposes. It has an obligation to safeguard and maintain these goods, using them for its own purposes and making them available to socie-

ty."

Historic churches and cathedrals with no property titles were not included in Spain's first property register, established in 1863 following a wave of confiscations by radical governments and reaffirmed under laws in 1909, 1915 and 1946. Under a 1998 law, the Catholic Church was invited to register its assets by a simple ownership declaration.

However, in a 3,000-page report published recently, the government said the 34,961 assets registered before the law was modified in 2015 had included many non-religious assets, including residential buildings, garages, farms and vineyards. The report gives the Church until 2023 to provide proof of ownership of the assets.

In a radio interview last month, Deputy Prime Minister Carmen Calvo said she had debated property issues with the bishops' conference president, Cardinal Juan Jose Omella, and believed the Church would adopt a "reasonable position," knowing "some things have surely been registered which should not have been."

However, she added that, while some lands and buildings were "clearly Catholic Church assets in the field of historical heritage," court challenges were likely to the church's ownership of others.

Auxiliary Bishop Luis Argüello Garcia of Valladolid, secretary-general of the 87-member bishops' conference, told journalists that the Church's assets remained "at the service of the common good

through activities proper to the Christian community," while also having "extraordinary historical, artistic and cultural value." He called for co-operation in their maintenance and use.

"We are pleased with the report's recognition that the Church acted legally in meeting the registration procedures," Bishop Argüello said. "The Church does not want anything which does not belong to it to be in its name – if someone comes forward with a better right, we are willing to review the registration, as when required by law."

Some politicians have urged the government to cancel the Church's ownership claims outright and require the reregistration of all assets, while reasserting public own-

ership of historic religious buildings such as Cordoba's sixth-century mosque-cathedral.

However, in its website statement, the bishops' conference said some of the Spanish Church's oldest properties, such as cathedrals in Toledo and Tarragona, dated from the first century, and had acquired assets via tithes, donations and acts of patronage. Such church properties predate states, municipalities and councils, it noted.

"The Church runs places of worship, but also parish centres, schools, hospitals, hostels, etc., which generate significant maintenance and conservation costs which the Church meets as part of its mission. ... The possibility of making business from them, as some suggest, is non-existent."

Debate on euthanasia makes its way into Peru's presidential campaign

Lucien Chauvin

Peru's Catholic bishops weighed in on the newest issue roiling Peru's upcoming presidential elections – euthanasia.

A Superior Court judge in Lima, Peru's capital, ruled on 25th February that the country's criminal code covering "mercy killings" would not apply in the case of a woman suffering from polymyositis, a degenerative muscular disease.

Ana Estrada, 44, was diagnosed with the disease more than three decades ago. She is no longer mobile;

in 2015, she was given a tracheotomy and has been connected to a respirator since. She decided then to look for options for a "dignified death" and in January presented her case before the court.

The judge's decision in her favour, however, quickly went beyond Estrada's immediate case, with presidential candidates, civil society groups and the bishops' conference laying out their positions.

Euthanasia has suddenly become part of a trio of issues, along with marriage equality and reproductive rights, provoking heated debate with

weeks to go before the elections on 11th April.

Peru's bishops, while saying they understand Estrada's suffering, released a statement last week warning against euthanasia.

"We must remember that euthanasia will always be the wrong path, because it goes against the inalienable right to life, causes the direct death of a human being and, as a result, is an intrinsically evil act," read the bishops' statement.

Several presidential candidates were not as considerate in their opposition. Rafael López Aliaga of

the conservative Popular Renewal Party said the state should not be involved and if someone wants to die, they should "go to the top of a building and jump."

He has a different opinion about abortion, including in the case of rape. He said the state cannot allow abortion under any circumstance and that any girl or woman who opts for an abortion would later "have major mental problems."

A number of parties, however, have defended the judge's ruling in Estrada's case. Congressman Gino Costa of the governing Purple Party

submitted legislation in late January that would allow terminally ill patients to request assistance to end their lives.

Costa called the court's decision in Estrada's case historic, saying that it made it "even more urgent for the Health Committee in Congress to debate the bill on euthanasia."

Unlike the court ruling, the legislation submitted by Costa is broader and would require all hospitals to comply if a terminal patient opted for assisted suicide.

If Costa's bill becomes law, Peru would be following Colombia, the only country in South America that allows euthanasia. Colombia's Constitutional Court accepted euthanasia in 1997, but it was not used until 2015. A bill is pending in Colombia's Congress to create the legal framework for euthanasia.

Chile is also working on an assisted suicide law. The lower chamber of Congress approved legislation in December, but it was returned to the Health Committee to iron out changes, including stipulating 18 as the earliest age a patient could request euthanasia. Chile holds elections on 11th April for a Constituent Assembly that will write a new constitution. The right to assisted suicide would be written into the new constitution.

Maryknoll Father Joe Fedora prays with staff and patients in the Santa Rosa infectious diseases ward in Lima's Dos de Mayo Hospital in this 2014 file photo. After a court in Lima ruled that a woman with a terminal illness could end her life, Peru's bishops expressed empathy but opposed euthanasia, an issue that has become prominent in the country's presidential campaign. (CNS photo/Barbara Fraser)



Carol Glatz



VATICAN LETTER

Media guidance from a pope and a saint, both named Francis

When Pope Francis met with a *Catholic News Service* delegation marking the agency's 100th anniversary, he encouraged the agency to continue to foster dialogue and honest communication.

"We need media that can help people, especially the young, to distinguish good from evil, to develop sound judgements based on a clear and unbiased presentation of the facts, and to appreciate the importance of working for justice, social concord and respect for our common home," he said in his written message.

At a time of increased division, Catholic journalists should promote unity in diversity that beats with "one heart" and "try to get people to talk to each other, reason together and seek the path of fraternity."

If that sounded like marching orders for the Catholic press, there have been plenty of road maps posted along the way on how to get there.

Pope Francis, in fact, has used his whole pontificate, soon to enter its ninth year, laying out a very clear path away from the temptation to fall for the sins of disinformation, calumny, defamation and "a love of dirt" or scandal.

Analysing every speech and message by the pope to reporters and communicators, one Catholic communications professor said he has boiled it down to following

three virtues: People in the media are called to "go out," "listen" and "care for," said Giovanni Tridente, a professor at Rome's Pontifical University of the Holy Cross.

"Going out" to where the news is happening and "listening" attentively to people helps provide a picture that is closer to the truth, he said, avoiding the telephone-game chain of misreadings, filters and partial snippets of someone else's story.

"At the end of the day, it's very simple and very clear why we are in this situation, why there are these conflicts and problems, because fundamentally we are not caring for those around us, not doing our job well, not taking care of our work, not taking care of our words, our language" in ways that send the correct message, he told *CNS* on 5th February.

When people really care about what they do and how they do it, they also bring hope, he said.

It is possible to "tell the story without pessimism – where

everything is bad, it's all a conspiracy – but I do so by using words that give hope without hiding the problems," he said.

Giving context, showing the bigger, more complex picture and showing solutions, he added, are part of "constructive communication that fosters understanding and getting people to come together."

The overarching guide, Tridente said, is wanting what is best for all of humanity and rekindling joy in people's hearts, which comes when "one goes out to repair bit by bit all the things we have slowly destroyed" in a spirit of human fraternity.

Going out to rebuild something broken echoes a similar call taken up by St Francis of Assisi, who also has much to offer to communicators.

Franciscan Father Enzo Fortunato, a journalist and director of the monthly magazine *San Francesco*, which also celebrated its 100th anniversary, told *CNS*



St Francis of Assisi is depicted in this detail from a fresco in the Basilica of St Francis in Assisi, Italy. Franciscan Father Enzo Fortunato, a journalist and director of the monthly magazine, *San Francesco*, said communication in the spirit of St Francis is like a tree, whose roots are Jesus, and whose three main branches are peace, solidarity and caring for creation. (CNS photo/Octavio Duran)

their founder showed "a good word is also a good action."

The 13th-century saint went out into the world, showing respect for people and creation, and seeking to bring peace to people – both in their relations with others and within their own hearts, he said by telephone from Assisi.

"The most beautiful story to tell in mass media is the one that begins with people's hearts," that is, their backstory and experiences, "their failures and successes." Communication in the spirit of St Francis, the friar said, is like a tree whose roots are Jesus, and whose three main branches are peace, solidarity – particularly with the poor – and caring for creation.

"These are the three facets of

communications that are seen and mirrored in the three great encyclicals of this pontificate: *The Light of Faith*, the faith as the light towards peace; *Laudato Si'* on the importance of one's relationship with everything that surrounds us in creation; and *Fratelli Tutti* on solidarity and fraternity," he said.

While the first encyclical helped complete a trilogy started by Pope Benedict XVI, the last two were fully in the vein of Pope Francis with direct ties to St Francis of Assisi, his papal namesake.

Catholic media, "which has an important role to play on every level," can also take inspiration from this saint, Fr Enzo said.

"Franciscan communication finds its strength in its ability to point out the good, to live the good and follow the good," the priest said. Likewise, "Catholic media hinge on the good," since the Gospel as good news is intrinsic to its mission.

"And the good is always contagious," he said. "We need to contaminate the world with stories of goodness and beauty."

Tridente said this is how the Catholic press can best move forwards, instead of – what sometimes happens – blaming the downfall of professional journalism on the emergence of social media content creators.

"If we take back our mission of being journalists," he said, "we would fill a void and be that person who truly goes towards those situations" that need telling, who truly listens and tells the story in a "language of hope," inspired by a Christian desire to do good for others.



Pope Francis answers questions from reporters aboard his flight from Tokyo to Rome on 26th November, 2019. In comments made last month to *Catholic News Service*, Pope Francis said the world needs media that can help people distinguish good from evil and develop sound judgment based on facts.

(CNS photo/Paul Haring)

Chris McDonnell



JOURNEY IN FAITH

A bowl of rice

Carole King's fabulous song *Tapestry* begins with these words:-
*'My life has been a tapestry
 of rich and royal hue
 an everlasting vision of
 the ever-changing view
 a wond'rous woven magic
 in bits of blue and gold
 a tapestry to feel and see,
 impossible to hold.'*

Those few words speak of the tapestry of our lives in a simple yet direct manner. There are high points and deep troughs, colourful days and drab occasions, tears and laughter-all come together to shape who we are, painting the picture of our brief lives.

How might we determine the consequence of our last 12 months of lockdown crisis, with all the pain brought about by viral infection? If we have learnt anything it could be summed up in one word-interdependence.

Day after day we have been faced with our dependence on others, medics in our health service caring for the sick, essential workers in our supermarkets, home delivery drivers bringing goods to our front door, teachers supporting home tuition and many more. Even in lockdown we are not self-sufficient, we need the help and support of others as we live

through a radically changing pattern of life.

This interdependence was succinctly described in an email I received recently from the writer Jim Forest. He is currently working on a book based on his experiences with the Vietnamese monk, Thich Nhat Hanh. It will be published by Orbis Books this April under the title, *Eyes of Compassion*.

In his email Jim recalled an exchange between them regarding a rice bowl. I quote it here with Jim's permission. 'Thay', pronounced 'Tie' is Vietnamese for 'teacher'.

"After supper one night, Thay held an empty rice bowl and said: "Jim, think of all the threads that are passing through this bowl. Think of the people who made it. Think of those who taught them their craft. Think of the people who played a part in learning to make a bowl that could last through many meals. Think of the people who dug the clay. Think of the fire that making this dish required. Think of the wood cutters. Think of all the meals that have been served in it. Think of the people who made the meals and of those who taught them their skills. Think of the farmers who grew the food we eat from this bowl. Think of all the light that has brightened



this bowl. Think of the water that has washed this bowl, water that has fallen as rain and disappeared into rivers and oceans and risen into the air as clouds and then fallen again as rain. In such thinking you are only beginning to see this bowl. The whole universe is present in this bowl."

These few words struck me forcefully, so much so that I took the liberty of taking them out of their prose arrangement and reshaping them.

Meditation on a rice bowl

Thich Nhat Hanh

*After supper one night,
 Thay held an empty rice bowl
 and said,*

*Think of all the threads that are
 passing through this bowl.
 Think of the people who made it.
 Think of those who
 taught them their craft.
 Think of the people who played
 a part in learning to make
 a bowl that could last
 through many meals.*

*Think of the people
 who dug the clay.
 Think of the fire that
 making this dish required.
 Think of the wood cutters.
 Think of the people who
 made the meals and of those
 who taught them their skills.*

*Think of all the meals
 that have been served in it.
 Think of the farmers who grew
 the food we eat from this bowl.
 Think of all the light that
 has brightened this bowl.*

*Think of the water that
 has washed this bowl,
 water that has fallen as rain
 and disappeared into rivers.*

*Think of the oceans and
 the water risen into the air
 as clouds and then fallen
 again as rain
 In such thinking you are only
 beginning to see this bowl.
 The whole universe is
 present in this bowl.*

They tell a story developed round the simple rice bowl, a common enough pot in Vietnamese culture, handled day after day without a second thought.

Yet each line explores the back story that made this simple bowl available for every-day use.

Those directly responsible for forming the shaped clay that gives substance to the bowl, the skill of the potter, the craft of an artist acquired over many years.

But he didn't work alone. Others dug the clay from the earth, gathered the wood for the fire that baked the simple small shape in the kiln, giving it permanence in order that it might fulfil its intended use.

Yet when finished it remained empty until the culinary skills of the kitchen cooks prepared food to fill it for others to eat. The raw ingredients, gathered from the skill of farmers, transformed by their experienced hands in to a meal to feed strangers.

The text concludes with reference to the water cycle that all life on earth depends on. It tells of the evaporated moisture from the

oceans falling as rain to earth for our nourishment and use. Truly as he concludes: *'The whole universe is present in this bowl'*. In a few words he shows us simply and without fuss how we depend on each other in our daily lives.

Maybe that is the greatest lesson from the pandemic that has swept our world causing so much havoc and confusion. Our response has been to realise how much we depend on others in our time of need.

Thich Nhat Hanh has been living in recent years with a Buddhist Community in France, Plum Village. In 2005, the Vietnamese Government gave permission for Thay to return home for a visit, a journey he was able to repeat two years later. In November 2014, he suffered a severe brain Haemorrhage which resulted in his losing his ability to speak. He communicates silently using facial expressions, gestures nodding and shaking his head in response to questions.

In October 2018 Thay, now aged 92, returned to Vietnam to spend his remaining days there. His home is in the Tu Hieu temple of Hue, the same temple that he entered when he was 16. His health is remarkably stable. When there is a break in the rains, he comes outside in his wheel chair visiting the temple's ponds and shrines.

In her song *Tapestry*, Carole King sings of *'a man of fortune, a drifter passing by'*. May the words of this monk from another culture and a distant country, a drifter passing by, serve to remind us how much we need one another in our daily lives.

Thich Nhat Hanh, Vietnamese Zen Buddhist teacher and author of over 100 books.



Fr Michael Collins



Panoramic view from Capri Centre Belvedere, on Capri Island, Italy.

The enchanting island of Capri

Among the islands sprinkled across the Mediterranean, one of the most enchanting is that of Capri.

Lying just 24 miles off the coast of Naples, Capri conjures up visions of inexpressible beauty. Each Spring, the island shakes off its winter slumber to welcome hoards of tourists who come from all over the world to enjoy its delights.

Ships and boats invariably arrive in main port of Capri. The pungent whiff of petrol from the ferries mixes with the odour of the fish brought to shore each day and sold to the inhabitants and restaurant owners.

By late Spring, the island is ablaze with bright azalea trumpets and the ubiquitous mimosa. The grey winter clouds clear, leaving the most limpid of azure skies. The island is covered with pine trees which exude a particular scent which grows stronger as the days become warmer.

The majority of visitors to Capri are day-trippers. The more enthusiastic board boats at Naples, Sorrento or Amalfi in the early morning, intent on squeezing the maximum amount of pleasure

from the day. Others come for a few days and lodge in some of the elegant hotels which dot the island. Private yachts also dock in a marina close to the main port.

Immediately upon disembarkation, visitors are met by a host of guides offering tours of sea grottos and sites of the island.

While many have already booked a guide, or are happy to entrust themselves to those whom they meet at the dock, others are determined to “do Capri” on their own.

A variety of phone apps are available to help the visitor and to indicate which sites are most likely to attract their attention. They also helpfully offer information about the myriad of restaurants which are dotted across the island.

There are a few ways of ascending to the upper part of the island where most inhabitants live. Taxis are one, rather expensive option, but most settle for the funicular, which within a few minutes brings passengers to the main town centre of Capri.

It is easy to be lured into the perfume shops or luxury fashion boutiques. Freshly baked waffles, filled with scoops of ice-cream

seem to be in every tourist’s hand. For several years I accompanied students from the Rome campus of Duquesne University. Although our goal was the imperial Roman villas, I discovered the futility of trying to frog march my young charges without a stop at the ice cream parlour. When I tried to be strict, I was countered by my imploring students who accused me of disregarding fundamental human rights – to *gelato*. It seemed that the first word students learned in Italian was the command for ice cream.

Fortified with a cappuccino or an ice cream, the island is there for the taking.

A pretty street not to be missed, the *Via Camerelle*, is lined with fashion shops. It leads into the *Via Tragara* which meanders down to the most spectacular view of the island, a group of three rocks which once were part of Capri. The *Faraglioni* are surely the most photographed rocks in the Mediterranean Sea.

For anyone with an interest in Roman history, the palace of the emperor Tiberius is a must-see. It is quite a hike uphill, along narrow roads which are little more than



(above) The Faraglioni off the coast of Capri.

(below) The remains of Villa Jovis, built by emperor Tiberius and completed in AD 27.



lanes. Even walking quickly, it takes about 40 minutes from the town square of Capri to get to the ruins. But the effort, even on a hot morning, is worth it.

The Roman historian Suetonius despised the emperor Tiberius

(r.14-37 AD) who spent the last 13 years of his reign on Capri. In his *Lives of the Twelve Caesars*, Suetonius asserted that the emperor lived a life of debauchery. There were tales of how those who had displeased the emperor were

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(above & left) The courtyard of the *Certosa*, a 14th century Carthusian abbey.

monastery, demanding that the monks bury them.

The prior of the monastery had the most glorious monastic property in the world. From the window of his cell, steps were hewn which allowed him descend to the sea for a dip.

In 1808, Napoleon ordered the dissolution of the monastery and for a while it served as an army barracks and later as a prison. Despite a brave attempt by the Canons of the Lateran Basilica to re-establish religious life almost a century ago, the charterhouse is now under the care of the Italian Government. A school occupies the buildings around the courtyard while other large rooms house a series of monumental canvases by the German artist Karl Wilhelm Diefenbach.

Today the vast Gothic church is virtually abandoned. The magnificent Renaissance frescos have largely disappeared as has the furniture. Given its remarkable acoustics, the church is occasionally used for concerts.

Most people leave the island on the last ferries which set sail in the evening. For those who decide to stay overnight, or even for a few days, the delights of Capri continue to unfold and enchant.

Fr Michael Collins is a priest and author living in Dublin, Ireland, with a passion for history, arts, culture and travel writing. His two most recent books are short biographies. *NEWMAN A Short Biography*, published in 2019 by Messenger Publications, was written to mark the canonisation of Cardinal John Henry Newman. *RAPHAEL'S WORLD*, published also by Messenger Press, was written in 2020 to commemorate the 500th anniversary of the death of the High Renaissance painter, Raphael Sanzio da Urbino. Follow Fr Michael on Twitter: @frmikecollins

in danger of being cast from the upper ledges of the cliffs which surround the palace.

While these stories may have been malicious propaganda, contemporary records indicate that the emperor avoided Rome for fear of assassination and remained on the island for most of the year. Tiberius died at Miseno in the province of Naples at the age of 77. According to Suetonius, the young Caligula, his adoptive heir, may have been implicated in the emperor's demise.

The villa, one of 12 on the north east coast of Capri, is vast, although sadly only the ruins now remain. The stucco frescos have long since been washed away by rain and cracked by wind while islanders removed the marble cladding centuries ago to adorn their own houses.

The views from the imperial palace are spectacular and it is easy to understand how the paranoid emperor preferred the security of his palace in Capri to the perils of Rome. Standing on the terrace where the emperor spent most of his summers overlooking the sea, one can almost hear the voices of Romans, dead long since, echoing like wheeling seagulls.

The most famous residence on Capri is the *Villa San Michele*, a house built on several levels by the Swedish physician Axel Munthe.

Munthe wrote his novel, *The Story of San Michele* in 1929, an unusual blend of autobiography, archaeology and architecture. It became a best seller and helped stoke the growing fascination for the island among international visitors.

Asked for the secret of his house, with its eclectic collection of antiques, Munthe replied: "light – there must be light everywhere." Following the uneven terrain, Munthe succeeded in designing a villa and terrace gardens of spectacular beauty.

Of all the buildings on Capri, my favourite is the *Certosa*, a 14th century Carthusian abbey.

The monastery was founded by Count Giacomo Arcucci, secretary to Queen Joanna of Naples in 1371. The queen had granted Arcucci the land with the proviso that a monastery should occupy some part of the territory. In 1386, falling suddenly from royal favour, Arcucci entered the monastery as a monk.

The monks were in constant conflict with their neighbours as the royal decree allowed them graze their animals across most of the island. In 1656, plague arrived on the island. The monks sealed themselves into the abbey, refusing to assist the dying. In revenge for their lack of co-operation, the people carried the corpses of those who died to the walls of the

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■ David Torkington's page is temporarily on hold for a few weeks due to health reasons.

New books demonstrate majesty, power of Vatican through the years

VATICAN SECRET ARCHIVES: UNKNOWN PAGES OF CHURCH HISTORY, by Grzegorz Gorny and Janusz Rosikon. Hardback - 370 pages.

THE CHURCH AND THE MODERN ERA (1846-2005): PIUS IX, WORLD WARS AND THE SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, by David M. Wagner. Paperback - 192 pages.

EIGHT POPES AND THE CRISIS OF MODERNITY, by Russell Shaw. Paperback - 150 pages.

All three books are available to buy online from Amazon.

"Rome has spoken; the matter is settled." Attributed to St Augustine in the fifth century, this maxim underscored the authority of the pope and the Vatican for more than 1,500 years.

These three books embellish and enhance our understanding of how

that power has evolved, particularly in recent times.

Foremost among the three is *The Vatican Secret Archives*. The word "secret" refers to restrictions on use, not on the content of the collections. In 2019, therefore, Pope Francis changed the formal name to the Vatican Apostolic Archives. As the authors note, the Vatican's archival collections have been used by historians for more than a century.

The Vatican Secret Archives is an overview of the history of the Church as shown in its documentary collections. The book is handsome, both well-written and well-illustrated. It will be an excellent addition to any church or parish library.

After an initial chapter that explains the structure and content of the Vatican's 650 collections, the authors focus on eight distinct historical events. These include the trial of the Knights Templar, the Crusades, the paradoxes of the Inquisition, the conquest of the Americas, the trial of Galileo, the French Revolution, the Spanish Civil War and the papacy of Pope Pius XII during World War II.

The stories are compelling and intended for a general audience. Value can be found in the design of each page and the images of documents and other antiquities are exquisite. Also of note are vignettes on curiosities such as the oldest book in the collection, the use of secret codes and the



discovery of missing manuscripts.

The majesty of the Vatican came at a price, however. The books by David M. Wagner and Russell Shaw articulate the struggle that popes have had with evolving modernity. Both Wagner's *The Church in the Modern Era* and Shaw's *Eight Popes and the Crisis of Modernity* highlight the enormous changes that have taken place in the Church and society since the installation of Pope Pius IX in 1846.

There's been a fundamental tension between Church doctrine and the societal changes brought on by industrialism, world wars, sexuality, technology and so much more. Both authors take on these challenges and provide clear overviews of how individual popes

have responded to world events.

Wagner's book is the final installment in the seven-volume series *Reclaiming Catholic History*. The series strives "to communicate history in a way that's accessible, even entertaining," notes Mike Aquilina, the series editor. "They see history as stories well told." And that is a goal that Wagner meets with aplomb.

He's produced a readable, 10-chapter volume that traces the evolution of the Church from 1846 to 2005. Each chapter includes a vignette of a saint of that era as well as a question for readers that focuses on the special challenge of that time.

Wagner also includes substantial notes, an index and a guide to further reading. Together these elements combine to make a thought-provoking book for the general reader.

Shaw is an author who needs little introduction to most readers of Catholic literature. In fact, he's been writing extensively on Church history and related issues for decades. It's no surprise, therefore, that his most recent book is a lively, well-reasoned overview of 20th century popes from St Pius X to St John Paul II.

The book is built on a series of brief biographical essays that Shaw first published in *Our Sunday Visitor*. In book form, Shaw expands his treatments and includes extensive excerpts from

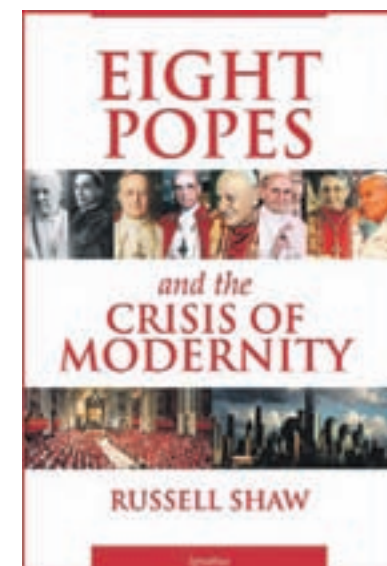
the writing of these popes that gives readers a better understanding of the values and philosophies of each man.

Shaw also includes a separate chapter on the Second Vatican Council and its central role in the history of the Church.

Together these three books remind all readers – Catholic and non-Catholic alike – of the central role of the Church in the evolution of moral and social values over two millennia.

It's an extraordinary institution that has been the guardian of knowledge, culture and the moral values that are the foundation of Western civilization. Rome speaks through these books.

Reviewed by Timothy Walch



Young people challenge us to care about creation

Sandra Azab

On 16th February, the Pontifical Academy for Life invited its members to meet online for a seminar on some of the ethical perspectives presented in Pope Francis' encyclicals *Laudato Si'*, *on Care for Our Common Home*, and *Fratelli Tutti*, *on Fraternity and Social Friendship*. This meeting gave us a space to discuss and reflect on the human impact on all life on our planet.

This raised some critical questions, such as: How can we speak about the dignity of every individual while our lifestyles and our use of natural resources are already depriving a significant part of humanity of the foundations of life?

It's important to share those reflections with the Church and the community to indicate practical steps for all of humanity to move forwards.

Laudato Si' is a huge wake-up call for humanity so that we realise the

destruction we inflict on the environment and our fellow human beings. We must develop and apply sustainable, ecologically compatible production methods with the help of people's expertise and science's creativity. But we must also shape our lifestyles in such a way that the earth's resources are used justly.

The Covid-19 pandemic has exposed our false security. *Fratelli Tutti* highlights how this time has highlighted our interconnection and interdependence. The pope writes that "the brutal and unforeseen blow of this uncontrolled pandemic forced us to recover our concern for human beings, for everyone, rather than for the benefit of a few" (No. 33).

Pope Francis has given the Church and the community a guiding light that shows the way to repair our common home and build a better future for our society. It is time to recognise ourselves as the body of Christ, to support one

another and to reflect God's concern for all people, especially for the most vulnerable. This direction will move society towards a better future.

One of the major challenges of my generation is the loss of faith. After seeing so much suffering, especially in the current pandemic, many millennials have questions. Their spiritual leaders don't have answers to these questions. The future looks alarming to this generation.

If we are willing to repair our common home, we will need young minds who are animated by their faith in God and care for creation. We care for creation not only because we live in it, but also because it reveals who God is. Millennials are in great need for spiritual leadership and discipleship in order to see creation the way God sees it! The Church cannot neglect this responsibility.

A recent document published by the Pontifical Academy for Life, *Old Age:*

Our Future. The elderly after the pandemic, highlights the role played by the elderly in the preservation and transmission of the faith to young people.

I believe that our role as young believers and scientists is to make the most of our faith and gifts, "for we are his handiwork, created in Jesus Christ for the good works that God has prepared in advance" (Eph 2:10).

Young people can serve as a voice of peace and reassurance and have the energy and passion to repair what has been damaged, both to the planet and to the fabric of human solidarity.

Scripture says: "God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power. He went about doing good and healing all those oppressed by the devil, for God was with him" (Acts 10:38). This is how young people, infused with faith, should seek the transformation Pope Francis dreams of for our world.

FEATURE

Pope's visit to Holocaust survivor focuses on the priority of remembering



Pope Francis talks with Edith Bruck, a Holocaust survivor and author, during a recent visit to her home in central Rome. (Catholic News Service photo/Vatican Media)

Cindy Wooden

A month after reading an interview in the Vatican newspaper with Edith Bruck, an author and Holocaust survivor, Pope Francis decided to pay her a visit at her home in the centre of Rome.

"I could never have imagined such a thing. When I opened the door, I burst out in tears and we embraced. We were both overcome with emotion," Bruck told *Vatican News* after the pope left on 20th February.

Bruck, 88, was born in Hungary to a poor Jewish family. In April 1944, they and their Jewish neighbours were rounded up and taken to the Nazi ghetto in Budapest and later that year sent to Auschwitz, where her mother died. Then they were sent to Dachau, where her father died, and on to Bergen-Belsen, which was liberated by the Allies in 1945. She moved to Rome in 1954 and has lived there since.

Her latest book, *Il Pane Perduto* (*The Lost Bread*) was published on 20th January. In connection with the book's publication and the annual commemoration of Holocaust Remembrance Day, on 27th January, *L'Osservatore Romano*, the Vatican newspaper,

published a long interview with her, recounting the horrors of the Shoah, but also the tiny points of light – small gestures of humanity – she experienced during her ordeal.

Bruck said that during the pope's visit, which lasted almost two hours, she shared her story with him, including the "five lights" she experienced in the camps, but the pope knew all about them. "He knew my book almost line by line."

According to the Vatican press office: "The conversation with the pope covered those moments of light sprinkled in the experience of the hell of the concentration camp" and the two spoke of "their fears and hopes for time we are living in, underlining the value of remembrance and the role of elders in cultivating and passing it on."

"I have come to thank you for your witness and to pay homage to the people martyred by the insanity of Nazism," the Vatican quoted the pope as telling Bruck. "With sincerity, I repeat the words I pronounced in the heart of Yad Vashem (the Shoah memorial in Jerusalem) and which I repeat before every person like you who suffered so much because of it: 'Forgive, Lord, in the name of

humanity.'"

The pope, Bruck said, expressed his sorrow at "the innocents who were annihilated" during the Shoah.

"But there is always hope. There is always a tiny light, even in the pitch black," she said. "Without hope, we cannot live. In the concentration camps, all it took was a German looking at you with a human gaze. All it took was a gesture. All it took was a human gaze. They gave me a glove with a hole in it; they left me some jam in the bottom of a plate. That was life inside. That is hope."

"Systematic cruelty, absolute evil" reigned in the camps, she had said in the January interview.

"If understanding is impossible, knowing is imperative, because what happened could happen again. I've made these words of Primo Levi my own," she said. "I have never harboured hatred or feelings of revenge, but rather disbelief and infinite sorrow."

"Evil only generates evil," she said. "Remembering is painful, but I have never shied away from it. Enlightening a single conscience is worth the effort and pain of keeping alive the memory of what has been. For me, memory is living, and writing is breathing."

Ellis Heasley

PRISONER OF CONSCIENCE

China: Spike in online hostility a reminder of the need for continued international attention

Last week, Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) research revealed a sharp and significant increase in online hostility towards Christians in China's Hebei Province after internet users alleged that the region's January 2021 coronavirus outbreak had originated in a church.

The false allegations led to some 1,000 related comments being posted on the Chinese social media platform Sina Weibo, including posts which called for churches to be completely disbanded and even encouraged the authorities to crack down harder on Christians.



Weibo, China's Twitter-like microblogging site.

While the comments were eventually taken down, they raised further concerns for Christians in China who have long experienced severe repression at the hands of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Observers told CSW that the comments were visible for several days before they were removed, pointing out that social hostility in other contexts, and particularly comments critical of the Chinese authorities, are usually censored far more quickly.

The incident is not the first time Christians in China have been targeted in relation to the Covid-19 pandemic. For example, CSW has received numerous reports of churches being prevented from returning to normal operations even as coronavirus-related restrictions were lifted.

Hebei province in particular also has a long history of violations against Christians. One observer told CSW: "Since Xi Jinping came into power, the regime has demolished thousands of

churches and Christian crosses. A large number of clergy have been imprisoned or simply disappeared. This year, two Chinese nuns working in the Vatican's unofficial diplomatic mission in Hong Kong were detained and placed under house arrest after they returned to Hebei province."

Christians familiar with the situation in Hebei expressed concerns to CSW that the CCP may have been involved in fuelling recent hostility in some way, especially considering the Chinese authorities have used disinformation to slander Falun Gong practitioners, Uyghur Muslims, and other religious communities in the past.

Regular readers of this column will no doubt be aware of the CCP's ongoing and severe crackdown on religious groups across China, as well as of those who stand up for human rights and freedom of religion or belief. As the United Nations Human Rights Council (HRC) meets for its 46th session this month, developments such as those in Hebei illustrate that it is essential that Member States remain consistently committed to raising these issues with China in both bilateral and multilateral discussions.

Please pray for Christians in Hebei and across China, asking God to shield them from harassment, hostility and harm. Pray also for other religious and ethnic minorities in the country, such as members of the predominantly Muslim Uyghur and Kazakh ethnic groups who have been arbitrarily detained in so-called 'political re-education camps.' Finally, please pray for robust international action on the human rights situation in China, including at this month's session of the HRC, that leads to genuine positive change in the lives of citizens across the country of all faiths and none.

Fr Francis Marsden



CREDO

The utter humility of John of God, which led to a totally selfless dedication to others

This Monday we remember St John of God, patron of Catholic booksellers, piety stalls and repositories.

He was a wild card among the saints, who discovered his vocation only beyond the age of 40. He reminds us that God writes straight with crooked lines. It takes all sorts to make the Church!

Connected with him, on Tiber Island in the middle of Rome, stands the Hospital of the Fatebenefratelli, or “Do-Good Brothers.” As seminarians, we used to give blood donations there. In Italy one has to pay for blood transfusions, so the English College had a “blood account” balance, which its students accumulated. Poor parishioners of the area could draw on it if needed.

The Fatebenefratelli belongs to the Brothers Hospitallers of St John of God, also known as the Brothers of Mercy. In England they run seven homes for the elderly, on Teeside, in West Yorkshire, and in Hatfield.

St John of God was born João Duarte Cidade in 1495, in the small Portuguese town of Montemor-o-Novo, Évora province. His parents were devout but impoverished.

The earliest notable episode in his life is strange indeed. Today it would alert safeguarding teams and police searches. A priest was visiting the family home, and when he left, the eight-year old João disappeared with him. His mother died from grief three weeks later. His father, having lost both wife and son, joined the Franciscans in Lisbon, where he too died a few years later.

The boy was apparently oblivious to all this. After 20 days on the road, the mysterious cleric left him in Oropesa in Toledo province. Fortunately the Mayoral

family took in this wandering boy. Francisco, the father, educated him. John grew up as a shepherd, and became a strong, healthy, hard-working young man.

When he was 27-years-old, Francisco wanted him to marry his daughter, but Juan was reluctant. To escape the insistent matrimonial requests, he impulsively joined up with an infantry detachment, to fight for the Emperor Charles V, against King Francis I of France who had invaded Navarre. Like many a young man, the attraction of seeing the world, winning military glory and riches had seduced him.

The reality of military life proved far from glamorous. His simple piety dribbled away. He was drawn into heavy drinking, quarrelsome gambling and coarse behaviour. It ended badly. Left in charge of the stolen loot of an avaricious officer, John briefly left the hoarded unguarded. It disappeared: the officer, furious at his loss, ordered John hanged from the nearest tree. Providentially a superior cavalry officer intervened. Instead, they stripped John of his rank, made him run the gauntlet, and dismissed him.

Humiliated, he walked painfully back to Oropesa, where he stayed four years more, minding the sheep, but declining marriage. In 1527, the Count of Oropesa was raising troops to fight in a Crusade against the Turks in Hungary. John joined up, and for the next decade lived a soldier's life. Eventually they returned to Spain, landing at Coruña.

Only now, some 30 years after he had left his parents, did he return to Montemor to seek them out. From an uncle, he learnt of their deaths, so instead he found work near Seville as a shepherd. Wanting to see Africa, and perhaps die as a martyr, he hatched plans

to try to free Christians enslaved by the Moors.

On the ship to Ceuta, on the north coast of Morocco, John fell in with an exiled Portuguese knight, whose noble family had been robbed of all their possessions. They soon fell ill in Ceuta. John found tough employment, labouring to build the colony's fortifications, earning just enough to feed and nurse the family. He was appalled at how badly the colony's Christian officials treated the workers and the poor. One of his close friends deserted and became a Muslim. Severely shocked, he fell into depression.

A Franciscan priest advised him to return to Spain. Landing in Gibraltar, the idea came to him of peddling holy books and pictures, plus popular romances, in order to earn a living and evangelise around Andalusia. On one journey he had a vision of the Child Jesus, holding a half-open pomegranate surmounted by a cross. “John of God, Granada will be your cross”, was the message.

He arrived in Granada in 1536. He was 42-years-old, but as impulsive as ever. A sermon by St John of Avila pierced him to the core. He began to shout out in church, beating his breast, imploring mercy. He did the same in the public streets, where people took him for a lunatic. He gave away all his stock of holy books and pictures, but still raving, was carted off to the Royal Hospital of Granada, to the wards for the mentally ill. Here “treatment” consisted mostly of solitary confinement, being chained up, daily whippings and near starvation. He accepted all this as penance for his sins.

A few months later, John of Avila visited him, told him to stop this “penance” and to behave himself, to do something more useful with his life. He started to look after the other patients in the hospital. On a pilgrimage Our Lady of Guadalupe told him: “It is by thorns, labours and sufferings that you must earn the crown my Son has prepared for you.”

He rented a house, somehow bought 46 beds and filled them with the sick. Considering his chaotic life so far, he ran everything in an amazingly orderly fashion. Each patient had his own bed, everything was clean, meals were punctual. He separated patients with infectious diseases



St John of God saving the Sick from a Fire at the Royal Hospital in 1549, by Manuel Gómez-Moreno González (1880).

from the others. He persuaded doctors, nurses and pharmacists to offer their services free. He brought in priests to hear Confessions and administer the Sacraments.

His first two helpers, Martin and Velasco, had been sworn enemies of each other, but John reconciled them. One Simon de Avila calumniated John incessantly, and followed him into a widow's house, hoping to incriminate him. Peering through a crack in the door, he saw instead a list of his own sins written on the wall, with a flaming sword above them. Another recruit!

Soon he had to obtain a second building, and eventually a third, a disused monastery. In 1549, the Royal Hospital caught fire. The firefighters dared not enter, but John bravely went in, rescued the sick, and threw as much bedding

and furniture out of the windows as he could. By now the Archbishop of Granada was on his side, and the civil authorities were offering financial support. He went begging at the Royal Court in Valladolid, but ended up giving away the considerable funds he raised to the city's poor.

He continued feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, sheltering the homeless tramps and caring for the sick, until his death aged 55 on 8th March, 1550. The Congregation was established later, in 1586. He was canonised in 1690 and made the patron saint of hospitals and the sick, and of booksellers.

“For the saints are sent to us by God as so many sermons. We do not use them, it is they who move us and lead us, to where we had not expected to go.” - Charles Cardinal Journet (1891-1975)



Fatebenefratelli Hospital is a hospital located on the western side of the Tiber Island in Rome. It was established in 1585 and is currently run by the Brothers Hospitallers of Saint John of God.

SUNDAY WORSHIP



Cleanse our hearts and minds

7th March, 2021
Third Sunday of Lent

First Reading: Exodus 20:1-17
The Ten Commandments, given to Moses on Mount Sinai.

Then God spoke all these words: I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery; you shall have no other gods before me.

You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, punishing children for the iniquity of parents, to the third and the fourth generation of those who reject me, but showing steadfast love to the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my commandments.

You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not acquit anyone who misuses his name.

Remember the Sabbath day, and keep it holy. Six days you shall labour and do all your work. But the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God; you shall not do

any work – you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your livestock, or the alien resident in your towns. For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but rested the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and consecrated it.

Honour your father and your mother, so that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you.

You shall not murder. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour. You shall not covet your neighbour's house; you shall not covet your neighbour's wife, or male or female slave, or ox, or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbour.

Responsorial: from Psalm 19

R./: Lord, you have the words of everlasting life.

The law of the Lord is perfect, refreshing the soul; the decree of the Lord is trustworthy,

giving wisdom to the simple. (R./)

The precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the command of the Lord is clear,

enlightening the eye. (R./)

The fear of the Lord is pure, enduring forever; the ordinances of the Lord are true, all of them just. (R./)

Second Reading: Corinthians 1:22-25

Christ crucified is our focus, calling a halt to all factions and disputes.

For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

Gospel: John 2:13-25

Jesus purifies the Temple of commercial defilement; then proclaims himself the New Temple.

The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. In the temple he found people selling cattle, sheep, and doves, and the money changers seated at their tables. Making a whip of cords, he drove all of them

out of the temple, both the sheep and the cattle. He also poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. He told those who were selling the doves: "Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father's house a marketplace!" His disciples remembered that it was written: "Zeal for your house will consume me."

The Jews then said to him, "What sign can you show us for doing this?" Jesus answered them: "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." The Jews then said: "This temple has been under construction for 46 years, and will you raise it up in three days?" But he was speaking of the temple of his body. After he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this; and they believed the scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.

When he was in Jerusalem during the Passover festival, many believed in his name because they saw the signs that he was doing. But Jesus on his part would not entrust himself to them, because he knew all people and needed no one to testify about anyone; for he himself knew what was in everyone.

Moving house

Psychologists tell us that, apart from the death of a loved one, perhaps the most traumatic experience a person can have is that of moving house. Those of us who have gone through all that is involved in this particular trauma can attest to the truth contained in these words. One of the benefits derived from the exercise, however, is that we get rid of all the junk we have accumulated since our last move.

It could perhaps be argued that people's dread of moving is directly proportionate to the amount of stuff they have gathered. The Israelites, having come out of Egypt, had been through the experience, and were inclined to avoid too much clutter. (One of the psalms laughs at the pagans who "carry around their idols made of wood.") Today we find Jesus clearing all the accumulated junk out of the Temple. But what is happening here is not merely the removal of unwanted items; by this symbolic act, Jesus is calling all the peoples of the earth to worship God "in spirit and in truth." True worshippers, he will tell us later in the gospel, are those who worship the Father in spirit and in truth.

Worship is not a word which figures largely in our religious vocabulary today. Like "adoration," it is a particularly God-centred word, ill-suited to be our self-centred age where religiousness is more often expressed in terms of self-actualisation. There is a sense in which it is true to say that people today have forgotten how to worship, so that often even our liturgical acts become simply gatherings or experiences. To worship means to acknowledge the transcendence of God, and his claim on us as our creator, and to respond appropriately. Rather than being just a relic of primitive religion, worship is an integral part of the Judeo-Christian religious sense. From deep within our self springs the desire to worship and adore God. Getting in tune with that desire, and expressing it through word and gesture is at the heart of prayer.

In order to worship in spirit and in truth, we must prepare our hearts and minds by being faithful to the covenant relationship (keeping the commandments) and seeking the wisdom of God, which is the wisdom of the cross. We have to let Jesus cleanse us, as he cleansed the Temple, leave our sins behind, and simplify our lives, getting rid of any needless clutter. Then we are able to enter into the new Temple, which is Jesus himself, praying in and through him.

When the side of Jesus was pierced on Calvary, the veil of the Temple was torn in two from the top to the bottom. The place of worship is no longer the Temple in Jerusalem; now, it is through the pierced side of Christ that we have "access to the Father in the one Spirit." So it is that, after the resurrection, Thomas will place his hand in Jesus' side and worship, saying: "My Lord and my God," as today's gospel tells us: "When Jesus rose from the dead, his disciples remembered? and believed. If we are to properly worship God, we must leave behind everything that gets in the way, then enter into that secret chamber which is the side of Christ, and there worship the Father in spirit and in truth.

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Questions and answers... with Fr Francis Doyle

Getting to know the rules of the Church

Q. I follow your column weekly and am fascinated by how often you quote a rule from our catechism, numbered into the thousands. Is everything Catholics do covered by a rule, and how is the ordinary person supposed to know every rule? Didn't Jesus say there are two commandments: love God above all things and love your neighbour as yourself?

A. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* serves as a handy summary of the Church's basic teachings. True, there are 2865 'sections' (each of them normally a single paragraph).

The vast majority, though, are not 'rules' but explanations of Scriptural passages and of Church teaching over the centuries. Most religions, by the way, have multiple 'rules' as a helpful guide to life's varied situations. The Jewish Talmudic law had 613 precepts.

I do, as you state, frequently quote the catechism as a handy way of responding to readers' queries. I have referenced the catechism in response to questions as diverse as the morality of artificial insemination and whether blessed articles can be resold.

To answer your question as to how ordinary Catholics can know 'every rule' of the Church, the answer is that they can't, which is the reason for a column like this. Even easier than reading a column, though, is simply to ask a local priest or religious educator.

Your appeal to Jesus' quote on loving God and neighbour is important. To be fair, Christ did not say that these two were the only commandments. His answer (in Matthew 22:34-40) came in response to a lawyer's question as to which was "the greatest" of the commandments. Jesus said: "The whole law and the prophets depend on these two commandments."

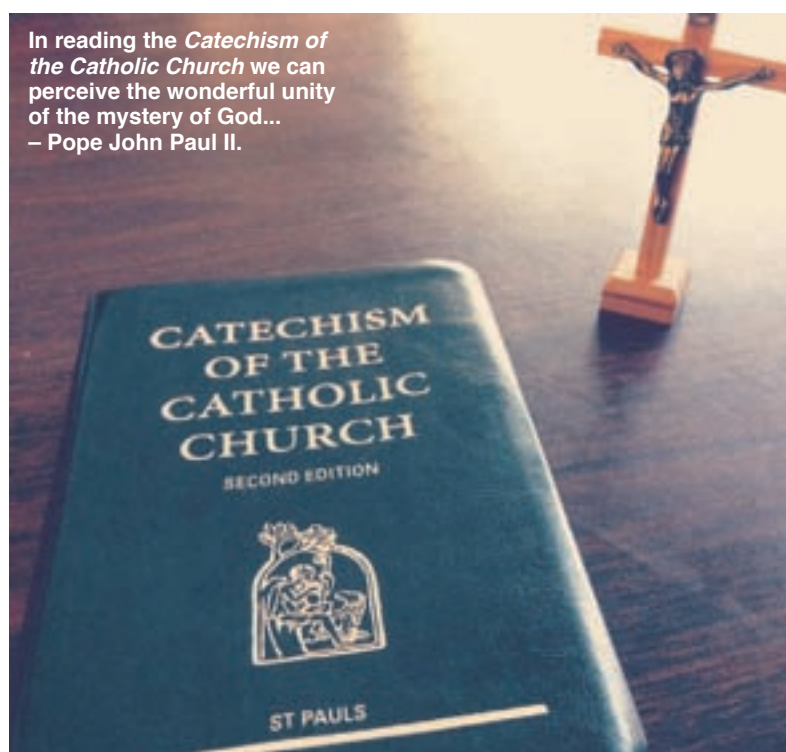
He did not say that this was all you needed to know.

Finally, as to whether everything Catholics do is 'covered by a rule', the answer is absolutely not. It would be far easier if that were so, if we could simply turn to a page in a book for clear-cut answers to every challenge of daily living.

Most of our moral issues are complex: how to be a good parent, how to get along with people at work, how to use to the fullest the talents God has given us. On these things, a manual of behaviour doesn't always help, only daily reflection, guided by prayer.

Q. My wife gave birth to a beautiful healthy baby boy about five months ago. He has not been baptised yet, due to concerns around Covid-19. Our current

In reading the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* we can perceive the wonderful unity of the mystery of God...
— Pope John Paul II.



plan is to wait until grandparents, godparents, immediate family members and spouses as well as ourselves have had the opportunity to get vaccinated.

Has the Church made an official statement on how to handle situations like this or have an opinion? Does our approach make sense, or should we consider changing it?

A. I congratulate you on the birth of your new baby boy. This is surely an exciting time for you and your wife – and for all of your family. I can well understand your desire to have everyone together to celebrate the good news. But I would surely suggest that you have the child baptised soon and not wait for months until everyone has the chance to be vaccinated.

Here's the Church's teaching on this: The *Code of Canon Law*, the official 'rulebook' of the Church, says: 'Parents are obliged to take care that infants are baptised in the first few weeks' (No. 867).

Several months is just too long to wait for the child to be missing the graces and blessings that come with the sacrament. I think parents have grown a bit too casual about this – perhaps due in part to what the Church is currently saying about limbo.

It used to be the common belief of Catholics that children who died before being baptised went, not to be with God in heaven, but to a state of natural happiness called limbo. But in 2007, the Church's International Theological Commission, with the approval of Pope Benedict XVI, concluded that there are 'theological and liturgical reasons to hope that infants who die without baptism may be saved...even if there is not

Peter's mother-in-law. And St Paul says in his First Letter to Timothy 3:2 that "a bishop must be irreproachable, married only once, temperate, self-controlled". But over time, the Church came to the realisation – as you yourself suggest – that a priest is most free to serve the people and his ministry by not having the responsibility of a family, and it was the First Lateran Council in 1123 that finally mandated celibacy for Western clergy.

That requirement, and the practical reason behind it, are reflected in the current *Code of Canon Law*: 'Clerics are obliged to observe perfect and perpetual continence for the sake of the kingdom of heaven and therefore are bound to celibacy which is a special gift of God by which sacred ministers can adhere more easily to Christ with an undivided heart and are able to dedicate themselves more freely to the service of God and humanity' (Canon 277).

Further evidence, though, of the fact that clerical celibacy is not a revealed truth but a matter of Church law can be found in the fact that, in the UK, there are a number of Anglican married clergy who became Catholic that have been allowed to be ordained as Roman Catholic priests while still remaining married.

Q. I was brought up to believe that a Catholic must be buried facing the east. Is that no longer true, and was it a part of the same law which said that the altar in a Catholic church must face the east?

A. There is no requirement in Church law regarding the position of burial. The only thing that comes close is a reference in the *Roman Ritual* of 1950 (no longer in effect) that stated that at the funeral Mass the coffin was to be placed so that the feet of the deceased should point towards the main altar.

Presuming the church had been constructed so that a priest celebrating Mass would face the east, the deceased at the funeral would face in that same direction.

Although there was no canonical requirement, it was in fact customary for people to be buried facing the east, reflecting the traditional Christian belief that, at the end time, Jesus would return from the east. An even earlier pagan tradition had the deceased buried facing the east because it was where the sun rose.

There is no fixed rule, and I know of some cemeteries where a large plot might have a cross in the middle with family members

buried in a circular fashion, their heads nearest the cross.

Correctly, you suggest that the same values guided the traditional placing of a church's main altar, so that the priest celebrating Mass could face the east. This evoked the Christian expectation as to Christ's return. (See Mt 24:27: 'For just as lightning comes from the east and is seen as far as the west, so will the coming of the Son of Man be.')

It also reflected the Jewish tradition, where the synagogue's congregation at worship looks together towards Jerusalem.

Most churches today celebrate Mass with the priest facing the people, across the altar. This highlights the communal dimension of the Eucharist as a meal of believers, while Mass offered with both the priest and congregation facing east emphasises the sacrificial nature of the Eucharist.

Q. Why do Catholics kiss the pope's ring? Did Our Lord walk around with such a ring? I don't know whether Pope Francis has had a ring designed for himself. It seems that he is trying to live the simple apostolic life.

A. For centuries, popes have worn a ring called the fisherman's ring. It shows an image of Peter, the first pope, marking Peter's original occupation and Christ's invitation to the first apostles to become "fishers of men".

Until 1842, the ring was used to stamp official papal decrees in wax as a sign of their authenticity, a fact reflected in the present-day symbolic destruction of a pope's ring at his death or resignation.

Characteristic of Pope Francis' preference for modesty, the his ring is actually not one newly designed at his election. The wax model for it was created decades ago for Pope Paul VI.

Though a ring itself was never produced at that time, Paul VI's priest-secretary kept the wax model, and sometime later it was cast in gold-plated silver. When he was shown the 'leftover' ring, Pope Francis chose it as his own.

Bishops, too, wear a ring that is presented to them in their ordination ceremony as a symbol of their 'fidelity to and nuptial bond with the Church'.

When people kiss a bishop's ring (a practice seen less frequently these days and often replaced by a simple handshake), they are expressing their respect for the bishop's role and responsibility in guiding the Church.

■ Please note that Fr Doyle cannot answer readers' personal questions through this column.



Ooberfuse –
Cherrie Anderson
and Hal St John



Fr Daniel Alkhory

Stand Up – God’s love will find a way

Millions will follow closely the Holy Father’s visit to Iraq this weekend – but perhaps none moreso than a two-piece dance band from London, and an Iraqi priest with whom they collaborated on their latest track. Nick Benson explains the link

Nick Benson

It has been almost 15 years since a young Iraqi teenager found himself leaving the country’s capital of Baghdad on his 16th birthday.

It wasn’t a decision he took lightly, but it was one forced upon him after he received a death threat from a terrorist group.

Fast-forward to 2021 and that one-time refugee is now 30-year-old Fr Daniel Alkhory, a priest who now works back in his homeland and has been looking forward to the pope’s visit since it was first announced. To mark the occasion, Fr Alkhory has joined forces with London electronic dance act Ooberfuse to record a new song entitled *Stand Up*, proclaiming the rule of love and end of hatred.

As part of his historic papal trip to Iraq this weekend, the Holy Father will visit the ancient Christian cities of Mosul and Qaraqosh and celebrate Mass in Erbil’s Franso Hariri stadium.

While there he will give a voice to the anxieties of the traumatised and encourage them to remain in their ancient homelands.

In 2014, in a bid to build a world-wide caliphate, Daesh/Islamic State chased embedded Iraqi communities from their ancient homelands. Driven north, these displaced groups set up improvised refugee camps. Their basic needs for shelter, food and water were answered by local and international humanitarian initiatives. Fr Alkhory ran one such project, repurposing his church to care for the traumatised fugitives.

Back then the priest knew exactly what it felt like to be a refugee driven from one’s home. Eight years earlier he had been forced to flee

Baghdad with just 24 hours’ notice after receiving a death threat from a terrorist group; failure to comply would have been a death sentence for him and his family.

Following this terrifying ordeal, Fr Alkhory answered his vocation from God, becoming a priest and, as he puts it, “changing my misery into ministry”.

He returned to Iraq once Daesh was defeated and is now a strong advocate for the country’s persecuted, working day and night to empower hope in their hearts to stay in Iraq and be the light and salt of the country.

“In 2014 my church became a shelter for thousands of displaced people fleeing their homes because of ISIS attacks,” he recalled. “I work day and night to strengthen the hope in their hearts to stay in Iraq.”

The priest has now translated this strength and hope into music, teaming up with Ooberfuse in an effort to fortify the hearts of the despairing as part of his first musical project.

“I met Ooberfuse in 2015 and we became good friends, united in our shared desire to nourish hope in the face of despair,” he said. “Our song, *Stand Up*, is an anthem of encouragement and a plea for peace.”

The London-based band, made up of singer Cherrie Anderson and musician Hal St John, merge Eastern influences into Western pop and have built a global reputation with their electric live performances, with recent tours to Japan, China, Korea, India, Philippines, Italy, Spain and Portugal.

Cherrie recalled meeting Fr Alkhory in 2015 while playing for refugees in Iraq. “We were doing

some improvised pop-up performances in the displacement camps run by the United Nations and Fr Daniel,” she told *The Catholic Universe*. “We would set up our sound system and, with Fr Daniel, bring some respite to the traumatised by playing a gig.”

“I am so happy to work on this song with Fr Daniel, bringing more encouragement and to make unheard voices more audible.”

Hal said that the track has “been in gestation longer than a baby elephant”, which can be up to 23 months!

The band remained in contact with Fr Daniel after that meeting in 2015, catching up again when he visited the UK to present the then-Prime Minister Theresa May with a Bible that had been burned in a Daesh attack on a church.

The chance to collaborate with the priest on a track timed to coincide with the pope’s visit to Iraq was too good to miss, Hal said, though it did bring with it some logistical challenges. “We were both in lockdown in our respective countries, so Fr Daniel went to an Erbil recording studio and then sent us his vocal takes on the draft track. We built up the track around these.”

Cherrie added: “One of the benefits of technology is that we are not limited by physical restrictions relating to collaboration nowadays. Virtual collaboration, such as recording and production, is now possible. The song has taken a while to complete, so we’re happy to share it now!”

Speaking of the pope’s visit to Iraq, the duo said they hoped it would bring peace and healing to the war-torn country.

“I think it’s quite an historic visit on many levels, quite apart from the fact this is the first time a pope will tread the plains of Nineveh where so many stories from the Old Testament were lived out,” said Hal. “In more recent times the city of Mosul is known to our generation as the battleground where soldiers fell defending treasured traditions against

Daesh terror groups.”

Acknowledging the many lives lost, including those in the Yazidi genocide and ancient Christian communities forcefully evicted from their homes, he hoped that Pope Francis “will show that we can live side by side in peaceful co-existence”.

“God’s prolific abundance is sufficient to supply us all so we don’t need to fight but to love one another,” he said. “Pope Francis will give voice to the lesser-heard Christian communities so that their aspirations for the future are heard and factored into plans for the country. More importantly, though, his mere presence in these territories will soothe the wounds and heal the pain of those survivors who are building for the future haunted by the terrors of the past.”

Cherrie, recalling her experience of witnessing the Holy Father’s visit to her home country of the Philippines, said she wants his visit to rekindle hope in Iraqi’s hearts.

“I hope that the message of peace and hope will resonate in the hearts of the local communities, and also in the hearts of everyone elsewhere in the world,” she said.

“I was in my birthplace, Tacloban, Philippines, when Pope Francis visited as part of his Mercy Mission, and I pray that his visit to Iraq will rekindle hope in people’s hearts like it did in mine, and remind us that the Lord will never abandon us, whatever we face.”

Cherrie said she would also like to think their collaboration with Fr Alkhory will bring a message of hope to everyone who listens, helping them realise “that we are all brothers and sisters”.

“I also hope that they hear the call to ‘rise up, stand up’ and not just be silent. The chorus talks about being a message of hope and not hate,” she added.

Describing the collaboration as a moment of celebration, Hal pointed out the power music has in helping to build bridges and bring people together in a common fraternity.

“We hope that everyone will drop their weapons so that they can raise their hands in the air to celebrate the coming of peace,” he said. “We joke that our music genre is EDM – Erbil Dance Music!”

“We have worked with some drummers from Baghdad whose rhythms provide authentic flavours as the song progresses. Fr Daniel is our main inspiration, though, with his gentle inflections and uncompromising call to end the hatred so that love may rule again.”

Hal added that the band is “privileged” to be a part of Fr Alkhory’s mission to sustain the fragile communities and to build their resilience, as the displaced are largely returned to their homes.

“We have been working night and day to collaborate and to make our track as celebratory as possible,” he said. “After a masterclass from DJ/producer Armin Van Buuren and some production excellence from Peter Gabriel’s Real World Studios, *Stand Up* is out now.”

And he vowed: “Love will rule again to end the hate that has plagued Iraq and the Middle East.”



Stand Up by Ooberfuse ft. Fr Daniel Alkhory is out now. To listen to the song, go to: Youtube: <https://youtu.be/3mk9COKvEJO> or Soundcloud: <https://soundcloud.com/oberfuse/stand-up-ft-fr-daniel-iraq/s-u2Y7rKtWH0I>

Readers' views/News extra

Your opinions: Letters to the Editor

We want to hear your views on the big Catholic issues.

Write to: Joseph Kelly, Editor, The Universe, Universe Media Group Ltd, 2nd Floor, Oakland House, 76 Talbot Road, Manchester M16 0PQ

E-mail: joseph.kelly@thecatholicuniverse.com.

Please keep letters concise; we reserve the right to edit.

No comparison between Covid and the flu

I do think that Chris Beaumont (*Catholic Universe Letters* 26/2/21) is being unduly pessimistic about us coming slowly out of the Covid third 'lockdown'. The extraordinary progress of the vaccination programme is surely reason for optimism.

Comparisons with influenza epidemics and pandemics are not unreasonable; roughly every decade, from the awful 1917/18 pandemic onwards, we have had a 'flu epidemic, often of pandemic proportions.

Many of us oldies will remember the very infectious, but fairly mild, 1957/58 Asian 'flu. The slow development of 'flu vaccines (strongly pushed forward by Sir Charles Stuart-Harris of Sheffield in the 1970s) finally started to reduce the severity of the outbreaks, and all that scientific progress was partly responsible for the amazing speed with which Covid vaccines have been produced – as well, of course, as a lot more cash.

Just like influenza, Covid is picking out the vulnerable, and it mutates frequently. However, with the very odd way of counting mortality as 'dying from any cause within 28 days of a positive Covid test', I don't think comparisons with the statistics of old 'flu epidemics will be useful.

I am sure that we will end up having annual Covid and 'flu jabs for the old and vulnerable.

Dr Steve Brennan,
retired Chest Physician
Thornhill, Nr Sheffield

Save the Church with an end to celibacy

I was overjoyed to see Chris McDonnell's excellent rebuttal of Fr Christopher Basden's ideas about causes of the dearth of vocations to the priesthood, the shocking consequence of which is lack of Eucharistic and other sacramental provision in large areas of the world, and the closure of churches in others.

The majority of bishops in the Amazon Synod pleaded for the ordination of married men. However, Cardinal Sarah had stated previously that the suggestion to abandon mandatory celibacy was 'the smoke of Satan'. Did Pope Francis's rejection of that Amazon vote lie in his fear of schism with Cardinal Sarah and others in the Vatican who think like him?

The Movement for a Married Clergy, for whom I once served as chairman, sent an email questionnaire to priests asking how many married men they knew who



Patience is a virtue: Nuns wait to receive the coronavirus vaccine in Bergamo, Italy. Photo: Flavio Lo Scalzo, Reuters

would come forward for ordination if the mandatory celibacy rule were lifted. The answer was nigh on 3,000.

I believe accurate semantics might help. Priesthood is a profession, a person's daytime work, like medicine, teaching or most close to the life Christ called for – being a shepherd, though the beings to be looked after are humans requiring spiritual food, rather than a flock. Peter, a married man, was told thrice to feed his flock.

Marriage is how one fulfils one's emotional existence, a lifelong committed love relationship which was created by God who said: "It is not good for man to be alone". Do young men realise the truth of these words of God? It is a happy home life which restores a person for tomorrow's work. Is it the fear of possible loneliness in life that is preventing young unmarried men committing to celibacy? The Church's mandatory celibacy is a law which sadly prevents happily married men and fathers being able to enter a life of caring for others for which they may be ideally suited.

We call Christ the spouse of his Church. Voluntary celibacy allows a special few to serve the Church in the same spiritual and emotional way as Christ did. The failure of mandatory celibacy, however, is all too clearly shown in child abuse scandals.

Medical advances leading to longer lives, and pension provisions, mean that there is a field of Catholic men in early retirement who have years of life ahead, and great experience to offer, the Church – and would do so for very little.

Let's give such men a huge chance of spiritual enrichment in

their baptismal roles as priests and prophets.

Elizabeth Price
Linton, nr Maidstone

'Vaccine passport' is a back-door ID card

With his classical education, the Prime Minister will be well aware of the myth of Pandora's Box. A domestic vaccination passport is one such unwanted gift. Open it and the spirit of a national ID card will fly out and beware, because it will prove impossible to return it to the box.

Margot Gilbert
Surbiton

The Universe, quite rightly, reports frequently on the Trussel Trust and the marvellous work that they do.

However I struggle to believe the Trust's assertion that 14 million UK households are living in poverty.

To most people poverty means having difficulty paying for the necessities of life: rent, food, heating, clothing. However, the Trussell Trust is using the Government's definition of poverty: a household whose income is less than 60 per cent of the median.

In my view this greatly exaggerates the extent of real poverty in Britain but more importantly it also means that we cannot reduce the official level by providing more income to lower-income households if those of higher earners are similarly rising. On the other hand, we can reduce "poverty" by reducing the income of higher-income households.

Surely the Government's definition should make sense to the rest of us.

Toby Stevens,
Lytham St Anne's, Lancs



Pope Benedict XVI reads his resignation statement during a meeting of cardinals at the Vatican in 2013. Referring back to that momentous day the retired pope recently told the Italian newspaper *Corriere della Sera* that "it was a difficult decision, but I made it in full awareness, and I believe it was correct." Photo: CNS/Vatican Media

It was a tough call - but the right one, says Pope Benedict

Cindy Wooden

In a rare interview, Pope Emeritus Benedict has acknowledged that his decision to resign from the papacy still shocks people – but although it was "a difficult decision, I believe it was correct."

The retired pope, who will turn 94 in April, resigned on 28th February, 2013. Today he lives in the Mater Ecclesia Monastery in the Vatican Gardens where he and his personal secretary, Archbishop Georg Ganswein, met the director of the Italian newspaper *Corriere della Sera*.

"His words come out drop by drop; his voice is a whisper that comes and goes," the article revealed. Sometimes, the report said, Archbishop Ganswein "repeats and 'translates', while Benedict nods in a sign of approval." Asked if he thinks a lot about his decision to resign, "he nods," the newspaper said.

"It was a difficult decision, but I made it in full awareness, and I believe it was correct," the retired pope said. "Some of my slightly 'fanatical' friends are still angry; they did not want to accept my decision."

Pope Benedict is aware of what he termed "conspiracy theories" about why he resigned. "Some have said it was because of the Vatileaks scandal," created when his butler leaked private documents to a journalist, he said. Others thought it was "a plot by the gay lobby," a supposed group of Curia officials who protect each other.

And, he said, some thought it was because of the case of Bishop Richard Williamson, who had been excommunicated in 1988 when he and three other traditionalist bishops were ordained against papal orders by the late French Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre, founder of the Society of St Pius X.

Pope Benedict lifted the excommunications in 2009 as a first step toward beginning formal talks

aimed at reconciliation with the group. However, there was widespread outrage at revelations that Bishop Williamson had denied the gassing of Jews in Nazi concentration camps. The Vatican said the pope had been unaware at the time of the bishop's radical views on the Holocaust.

Many of Pope Benedict's supporters, he said, don't want to believe his resignation "was a conscious decision" that had nothing to do with outside pressure. "But my conscience is clear."

"There are not two popes," he said. "There is only one."

Corriere described the retired pope as alert, even though it was difficult to understand his speech at times. His wrists are "extremely thin ... he is an image of great physical frailty." He wears a watch on his left wrist and an emergency alarm on his other, the newspaper said.

When asked about Pope Francis' trip to Iraq this weekend "his expression becomes serious, almost worried," the newspaper said.

"I think it is a very important visit," he said. "Unfortunately, it comes at a very difficult time, which makes it dangerous for security reasons and because of Covid."

Archbishop Mitja Leskovar, the Vatican nuncio to Iraq, who was supposed to host the pope throughout the trip, tested positive for the coronavirus and has gone into quarantine, the nunciature announced.

"I will accompany Francis with my prayers," the retired pope said.

Corriere also asked Pope Benedict about US President Joe Biden.

"It's true, he is a practising Catholic, and personally against abortion," the retired pope said. "But as president, he tends to present himself in continuity with the platform of the Democratic Party. And on gender policy, we still don't have a clear idea of his position."

A wilderness year of reflection

“You’re going to have to go on a journey and you mustn’t be afraid. You were always braver than you knew.”

This last year we have been on a journey none of us saw coming. A year ago we were watching from afar as numbers of Covid-19 cases were tracked. From a conference of headteachers in Cheshire, I observed data and graphs from afar, made connections with colleagues in Asia and listened to an esteemed epidemiologist. It all seemed like a story from a great distance. And we watched and we waited.

And as I drove back from Cheshire to London, past billowy blossom, a sense of the weight of what was to come grew. Within weeks we could no longer travel. Lockdown came, a word which had previously felt like something that happened in episodes of *The West Wing*. In that US TV series the president and his colleagues would be ‘locked in’ the Oval Office until some clear and present danger had been dealt with. It was something swift, caused by something violent, politically motivated and endured with colleagues not family.

For us that first lockdown meant time as well as travel stopped. People wrote of the benefits of being with family, found silver linings in the quality of time children might spend with their parents. We heard the ambulance sirens. The birds sang as never before, or was it because the planes had stopped and we could hear them? The beauty of the hawthorn filled the verges with its white flowers, horse chestnuts bloomed dusky pink.

Just over a hundred years ago the nuns who built our school arrived from France and they built a school. They planted an orchard and filled it with apple and pear trees rich with symbolism. These are old trees now, and their soft flowers in spring presage fruit and apples which beguile – large apples that look like cooking apples but are not. Varieties whose names we have lost.

Before lockdown we had invited an expert in identifying trees. A day spent munching and contemplating and matching all of the senses with modern genetic technology. Many varieties are still unidentified. But we encountered magical names – The Ten Commandments Tree, the Howgate Wonder and a French pear tree which we thought bore terrible fruit. Instead we learned that this pear is harvested then stored, then months later is poached to a soft pink. This orchard was planted to provide fruit all year round. It tells stories of nuns who travelled to England from France in the brewing of WWI. Those trees grew during the Spanish Flu of 1918.

In the heatwave of spring 2020, we dug out the allotment in the school grounds, we planted, sowed, tended chickens, raised ducks. The sunshine felt at odds with the solemnity of the time. We were still. No jour-



neying. Churches closed and Easter was streamed. We joined virtually in the Mass of choice across the world.

We drifted into the summer and some children returned to school. The trees were full of bright, light almost lime-green leaves, flourishing as we made our way through a world of regulations, bleach, masks and separation. We revelled in travel, journeys not far afield but far enough because it was enough to be free.

As open-windowed autumn gave way to Christmas, fear began to dominate. A bleak landscape of collective terror like the bare branches of winter emerged because now we knew too many who had died, or who were ill. We were cold not just because the windows in our classrooms were always open. The separation and isolation we were feeling seemed to erode community joy, hope and trust. A Christmas with no endless driving around the country



visiting was a relief. Sometimes not journeying is good.

And now we are in Lent 2021. The Wilderness. The interior journey. The story of Exodus and a leader of whom so much was asked. The story

of a people who were learning of a God of love amongst plague. This pandemic invites us to enter the Wilderness with curious hearts. The story of Exodus bears endless telling and retelling.



No doubt we will physically journey again and we will also return over and over to the stories we have created and lived in this time. Our children will tell their children.

I began with the words from the mini-series of *Little Women* in 2017. That is another story we have all read or watched time after time.

We have all been asked to make journeys which would have filled us with fear at one time. But we are braver than we think and we are equipping the next generation with the knowledge that like our grandparents, we survived something so much bigger than ourselves and we did it with grace and beauty and vision and the changing of the seasons and the liturgical year.

Mrs S Raffray MA, NPQH is the headteacher at St Augustine’s Priory



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Around the Parishes

CATHOLIC NEWS AND INFORMATION FROM ACROSS THE UK AND IRELAND



Cathedral reveals secret of its past with discovery of Victorian paintings

Shrewsbury: Conservators working at Shrewsbury Cathedral have discovered elaborate wall paintings from the 19th century still intact decades after they were hidden by two coats of modern cream paint.

Decorative colourful depictions of biblical scenes and the saints, painted on the walls around the altar and sanctuary of the cathedral, were feared lost when they were covered up with cream emulsion during alterations from the 1950s.

But investigative work undertaken by McNeillage Conservation has concluded that not only have the images survived but they also probably remain in a sufficiently good condition to be recovered and conserved as funds and resources allow.

The paintings were by Joseph Aloysius Pippet, a Catholic designer employed by John Hardman and Co. who worked in the chapels and chancel of the Cathedral from 1885. Photographic records show his completed work.

The diocese of Shrewsbury has accepted the conclusions of the report by the Devon-based specialist conservation team and has now commissioned further exploration into the possible costs of fully recovering the original beauty and splendour of many of the paintings in and around the sanctuary.

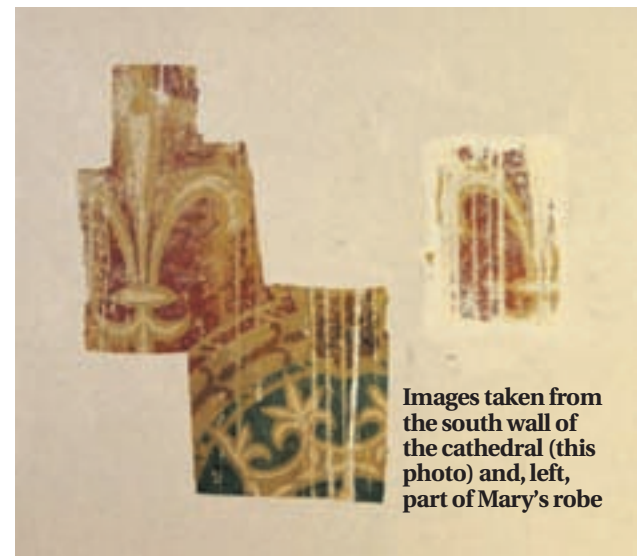
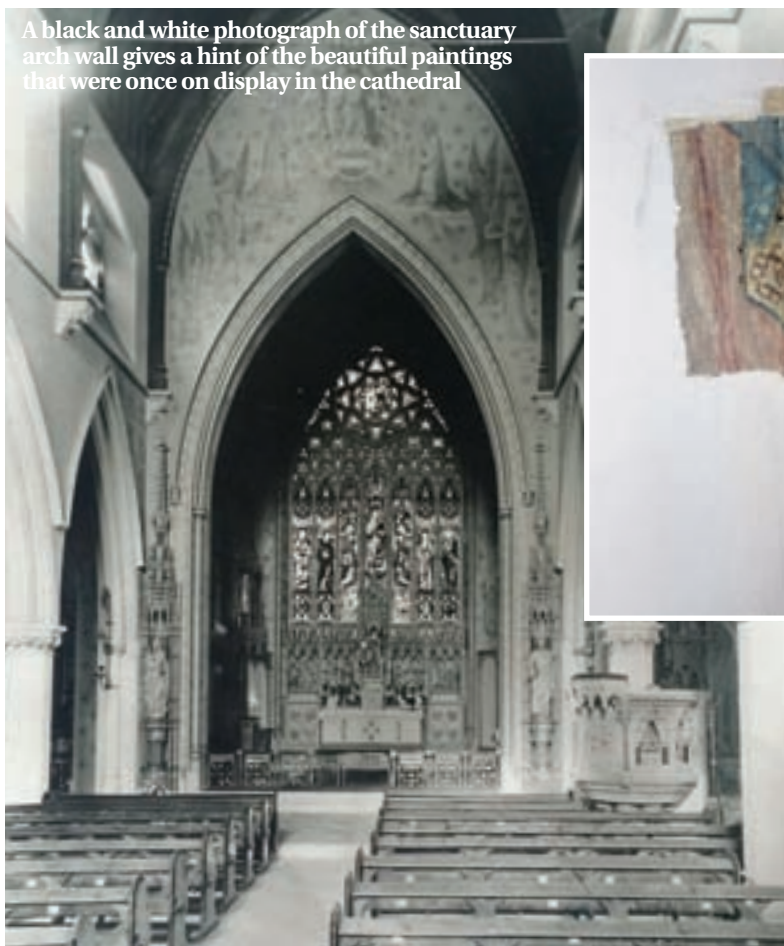
The exploratory work uncovered three sections of a painting on the upper north wall of the sanctuary showing the Archangel Gabriel visiting the Blessed Virgin Mary at the Annunciation, decorated also with images of a dove, a lily, star motifs, symbols for Mary and Latin inscriptions on scrolls.

Conservators found they were able to separate later layers of paint without causing any damage to the original artwork, and were able to expose a section of Mary's robe as well as two other parts of the painting.

On the south wall of the cathedral a fleur de lys and crown painted in bold hues of red and green have also been exposed.

The largest single painting, however, is high on the sanctuary arch

A black and white photograph of the sanctuary arch wall gives a hint of the beautiful paintings that were once on display in the cathedral



Images taken from the south wall of the cathedral (this photo) and, left, part of Mary's robe

at least two years and so far has involved the return of the sanctuary almost to its original design, a process which uncovered thousands of neo-Gothic revival floor tiles which had been covered by carpets.

A wrought iron cross has been restored, repainted and returned to the roof of the cathedral, while the bell has also been restored, repaired and cleaned, and is now able to chime again after nearly 50 years of silence.

Sophie Andreae, the Vice Chair of the Patrimony Committee of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of

England and Wales, said: "The discovery of the elaborate and colourful wall paintings surviving in such good condition under layers of modern cream paint is very exciting.

"The careful current restoration project, which will see the unsympathetic alterations carried out in the 1970s and 1980s reversed and the interior of Shrewsbury Cathedral restored to its former glory, is an inspiration.

"So many of our fine Victorian churches were damaged during the changes that came in with Vatican II. Sadly, this was just the moment when appreciation of Victorian architecture in this country was at its nadir and as a result much wonderful Victorian craftsmanship in our historic churches was lost," Sophie said.

"However, a growing appreciation of historic Catholic church buildings, and in particular their interiors, in recent years is leading to a re-evaluation of what was done back then and there is a welcome desire to restore beauty and colour to our buildings, based on sound historical research and careful exploratory investigations by conservators.

"This is exemplified by the recent work at Shrewsbury."

and shows Jesus Christ seated in glory in the presence of the Virgin Mary and St Joseph. Conservators have yet to reveal any section of the image.

The conclusion of the report, called *Shrewsbury Cathedral: A Wall Painting Survey*, said further work would enable conservators to "assess which areas can be conserved and restored and whether there might be some areas where the original decoration – such as the repetitive dado design – could be reinstated where it is missing".

"It would also be possible to give a realistic estimate of the time required to uncover large areas," the report added.

The investigations into the paintings came as part of a project to restore the cathedral to the original

glory envisaged by its architect, Augustus Welby Pugin, and its patron, John Talbot, the Earl of Shrewsbury.

The project is expected to run for

The leaves of a lily, from the north upper wall



SPRED volunteers thanked for their dedication

St Andrews and Edinburgh: The SPRED (Special Religious Development) group for the Archdiocese of St Andrews and Edinburgh has thanked three volunteers who have retired from their roles after many years of dedication.

Christine Pringle, leader of a group in George Square, Edinburgh, stepped down this month

from her position after 22 years as catechist and leader catechist.

A spokesperson said: "Christine will be greatly missed by her fellow leader catechists, catechists and friends.

"Special thanks for her love, dedication, commitment and support to all the SPRED Family."

At the end of last year Lawrence

Gilroy retired as catechist from the Tuesday 2 and Wednesday 1 groups at George Square.

An archdiocese spokesman said: "He too has devoted 22 years to SPRED, demonstrating his love and commitment to all his friends and Catechists. He will be greatly missed by all."

In addition, "a special thanks to

Betty Ingram who has decided to retire as a catechist after eight years in a group also at George Square. Betty has been a constant attender in her group and a loving and loyal friend to all."

SPRED is a parish-based programme that catechises children and adults who have learning disabilities.



To see your parish featured in these pages, contact Michael Winterbottom on 07949 987771 or via michael.winterbottom@thecatholicuniverse.com

Around the Parishes

LiveSimply award for Isleworth Primary

Westminster: St Mary's Catholic Primary School in Isleworth, West London, is the latest organisation to receive a LiveSimply award after a two-hour online assessment by inspectors from CAFOD.

For more than two years the school of 38 staff and 424 pupils have put into action a plan to move towards living simply, sustainably and in solidarity with the poor.

Their award is the 85th to be given and St Mary's is the second school in Westminster Diocese.

The assessors – Ellen Teague (Columban JPIC) and Maggie Beirne (West London Justice and Peace Network) – met with the school contacts for the award, Emma Dawson, Angela Scott and headmaster Farley Marsh. Their enthusiasm and dedication to their pupils and to the award's values was inspiring.

They worked through the report presented by the school. For living simply, the school has regularly promoted 100 LiveSimply ideas on the school website. A 'LiveSimply' banner is displayed at the entrance to the school, made from recycled materials and there is encouragement of individual and class initiatives to promote living simply.

In addition, children's liturgies and collective worship mark particular significant days such as the UN's World Water Day, while practical steps have been taken to reduce the school's carbon footprint, including meat-free days in the canteen. There is a lot of interaction with pupils around the menus and catering staff are engaged in planning a LiveSimply approach.

On living sustainably, significant efforts have been made to improve energy efficiency. The school is part of ReFit programme – London Schools Energy Reduction Programme, which allows major changes to lighting, boilers, electrical devices, to improve the environmental footprint. It also made a bid for further council funding to allow for improvements to heating, fitting solar panels and developing ground-source heating.



The school prayer garden



A blanket made from recycled materials

Points are given to children who are 'eco warriors' to reward recycling and reusing materials in classrooms, and picking up litter, and there is a 'paper free' approach to communications with parents. Single use plastic cutlery and polystyrene packaging are no longer used in the school, and a cycling scheme has been introduced to help pupils get to school without using cars.

A prayer garden has been developed in the school grounds allowing children space for reflection and prayer; this is situated alongside a wildlife-friendly garden which contains plants such as buddleia to attract butterflies.

The concept of 'Caring for creation' is woven into all areas of the school's work, and the RE department offers a whole unit on the encyclical 'Laudato Si', emphasising that faith is a key motivation for responding to the needs of 'our common home'.

The commitment to be in 'Solidarity with the poor' has involved recruiting children to be Mini-Vinnies – members of St Vincent de Paul – as ambassadors of the LiveSimply theme. The school supports a number of projects to help the developing world, including Mary's Meals and CAFOD world gifts – as well as people closer to home through a local foodbank.

Finally, biblical stories are used to raise awareness of poverty and motivate children to feel able to respond, and links with the local parish are strong. Regular use is made of CAFOD website materials for children's liturgies.

The assessors were impressed by the commitment of the staff and their close working with the children and parents. The Live Simply programme is regarded as a 'whole school' effort, with children fully involved in choosing projects. It was impressive to see how much was getting done, despite all the problems created by Covid-19. The school incorporates protection of the environment with other issues of justice and the thinking about how to do this has been very creative.

Future targets include recruiting more 'Mini-Vinnies' (linked to the SVP), moving the school buildings even further towards sustainability, and creating a new website which they will use to promote 'Laudato Si' and their Live Simply initiatives.



The Live Simply display in reception

OBITUARIES



Fr John was a man who loved truth and travel

Brentwood: Fr John O'Brien SCA, parish priest of St Thomas More, Barking, died peacefully in hospital in London on 18th February after a brief illness.

Fr John had been parish priest at the Barking parish since October 2012 and became ill with cancer just three weeks ago. "His presence and ministry in the parish and diocese will be greatly missed," said Bishop Alan Williams sm. "May he rest in peace."

John was born on 20th September 1955 in Fermoy, County Cork into a family of three sisters and a brother. He joined the Pallottine Fathers in 1972, made his First Consecration on 12th September 1975 and was ordained on 9th June 1979.

He subsequently served in Greenford and Barking as a curate and spent time studying in America. He served as parish priest in Hastings and was rector of the Pallottine College in Ireland between 1996 and 2002.

Fr Eamonn Monson SCA and Fr Tom Daly SCA, close friends from seminary days, were with Fr John in his last days in hospital.

Fr Eamonn says Fr John was a deeply spiritual man with a very strong relationship with God. "His fidelity to prayer was extraordinary and his spirituality touched the lives of everyone he met."

Very keen on charismatic renewal, he set up prayer groups wherever he went. "His desire to heal people was very special. He had very specific empathy for people's suffering and a desire to relieve that suffering."

He says one of Fr John's favourite scripture quotations was from Isaiah (12:3): 'With joy you will draw water from the wellsprings of salvation.' "He lived out of that. And joy was a great aspect of him – he had a great sense of humour and loved a laugh."

A very direct man, the truth was very important to him. "He didn't like any kind of pretence and was impatient with that. He said it how it was and had no fear of other people's opinions of him."

The pair often travelled together, returning regularly to Dingle in Ireland, for example. "John loved to travel. He worked very hard as a priest but he knew how to enjoy life and believed in the importance of that."

Fr Liam McClarey SCA, who is the Pallottine Provincial, will confirm funeral arrangements in due course. He said: "Please remember John in your prayer and Masses. We also remember John's family, close friends and parishioners at this time. May he rest in peace and be rewarded for his many acts of kindness and goodness, seen and unseen, throughout his life."

Fr John loved travelling back to Dingle in Ireland



Fr Ollie mourned across Midlands

Birmingham: It was with great sadness that the archdiocese of Birmingham announced the death of Fr Oliver Kemp aged 82 on 23rd February.

Fr Ollie – as he was known – was ordained on 19th March 1966 and served at a number of parishes across the archdiocese during his priesthood. They included All Souls, Coventry from 1966 to 1968; Handsworth from 1969 to 1970; Holy Family, Coventry, from 1970 to 1977; Headington from 1977 to

1980; St John the Evangelist, Chesterton from 1980 to 1985; St Joseph, Darlaston from 1985 to 1986; St Bernadette, Fegg Hayes from 1987 to 1999; Mother of God and Guardian Angels, Castle Bromwich from 1999 until his retirement in 2004. In retirement he resided at Aston Hall.

Please pray for Fr Ollie's family and friends; all those at Aston Hall where he was well looked after, and for all who mourn him. Details of his funeral will be announced soon.

Education

It's flippin' fun as online challenges bring pupils at Barlborough together

Almost 200 children at Barlborough Hall School near Sheffield, have taken part in what could possibly be the biggest ever virtual pancake flip!

Throughout the pandemic, the school has been thinking of new and innovative ways to keep those children who are working at home online engaged in full school life.

As part of this, all children have been set a weekly Tuesday Challenge, and to mark Shrove Tuesday they were tasked with making pancakes and showing off their flipping skills to their friends in an online whole school assembly.

Headteacher Karen Keeton said: "The school is focused on caring for the individual and just because some children aren't in school at the moment doesn't mean that care stops.

"We have been thinking outside of the box and devising things children can do at home as individuals but which make them feel very much part of a team. Events like this reassure them that they are still part of a very special school community.

"The pancake flip was so much fun – the enthusiasm and excitement of the children and staff was just amazing!"

Other extra-curricular activities devised to support pupils during the pandemic have included a very popular Friday Bake Off with Jack Murphy, the deputy headteacher at Mount St Mary's College, the senior school for Barlborough Hall.

Children across both school sites have joined Mr Murphy online to recreate a recipe by *Great British Bake Off* judge Prue Leith.

Mr Murphy said: "This has been a tough time for all school children and they've worked so hard whether they've been in school or learning remotely.

"To come together on a Friday and bake a treat has become something

of a tradition this term – it's a great way to interact and do something a bit different.

"Pupils from Barlborough Hall have joined in with the older children at the Mount. They 'meet' with me on Teams and then share their photos of their creations on social media.

"It's brilliant fun, the only downside is that I can't taste them all!"

A video of the Barlborough Hall School is available to watch at www.barlboroughhallschool.com



Annie, a pupil at Barlborough Hall, made her pancakes at the school

Harry Potter star to be patron of Bambisanani Partnership

Matthew Lewis, who starred as Neville Longbottom in the *Harry Potter* film series, is to become the patron of the multi-award winning Bambisanani Partnership charity.

The charity has gained international acclaim for its pioneering work in rural South Africa by using sport as a catalyst to promote education, health, global citizenship and leadership.

The charity was formed 14 years ago at Matthew's former school, St Mary's School, Menston and now involves the University of Leeds and Leeds Trinity University in delivering a range of projects and programmes in collaboration with South African partners

David Geldart, chair and founder of the partnership said: "Matthew became involved in Bambisanani Partnership activities when he was at school and despite his busy acting schedule, he has remained in contact ever since, supporting us in a variety of ways.

"Regardless of his fame and celebrity, Matthew remains a very modest, unassuming and well-grounded young man who wants to make a difference in the world. He really understands what the charity is about and the challenges that we face in South Africa; it is absolutely fantastic to have him involved in this formal capacity as our Patron."

Matthew added: "It's a real honour for me to become the patron for the Bambisanani Partnership. Having attended St Mary's School, I got to see first-hand the excellent work the partnership was doing in improving lives, not only in KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa but also here in the UK. It truly is a partnership where everybody involved gains and has their lives enriched.

"To quote The Beatles, 'the love you take is equal to the love you make' and I believe the Bambisanani Partnership is a perfect example of that. I've watched David Geldart and his



team pour so much passion into this project and it go from strength to strength. I now feel very lucky that, more than a decade out of school, I am able to give something back and get involved myself."

Over the past 14 years, the Bambisanani Partnership has worked with over 10,000 young people from South Africa and the UK, with students from St Mary's School, the University of Leeds and Leeds Trinity volunteering to deliver a host of projects in South Africa.

Following the *Harry Potter* series, Matthew has since gone on to appear in films including *The Rise* and *Me Before You*. He can currently be seen as the lead opposite Rose Matafeo in

newly released romcom produced by Taika Waititi's production company *Baby, Done*.

Television credits include award winning BBC drama *Ripper Street*, *The Syndicate*, *Bluestone 42* and BAFTA award winning drama *Happy Valley*. He recently had a stand out role in Kay Mellor's new series for ITV *Girlfriends* and can currently be seen starring in Channel 5's new flagship drama *All Creatures Great and Small*, which has also had great international success on PBS Masterpiece. Stage credits include *Verdict* (Bill Kenwright Ltd); *Our Boys* (Duchess); and *Unfaithful* (Found111).

More at www.bambisananipartnership.org

New teaching hubs to be rolled out to boost standards

Every school in England will have greater access to expert teacher training and development under plans announced by the Department for Education.

Teachers will get best-practice and expert advice on how best to engage with pupils, lesson planning, and classroom management, as part of new teaching school hubs being rolled out across the country.

Eighty-one hubs will be created across England to provide high-quality professional development to teachers and leaders at all stages of their career and play a key role in helping to build up trainee teachers as they enter the workforce. This will further level up the quality of teaching, allowing every child to receive a world-class start in life no matter where they are born.

Each hub, all of which will be operational from this September, will

have its own defined geographical area and will be expected to work with all schools within it, serving on average around 250 schools each.

The programme is being rolled out as teachers continue to deliver high quality remote education for pupils, with the current attendance restrictions in schools and colleges remaining in place until 8th March at the earliest.

School Standards Minister Nick Gibb said: "We know teachers are already providing the best education possible for pupils, and this is especially true while schools are closed to most pupils. These new Teaching School Hubs will further support the profession by providing the best possible training and development opportunities.

"It is important that teachers and school leaders feel supported in their



career. The hubs will make this easier, with expert practitioners able to give experienced advice to those schools able to benefit from it."

The hubs will be built around some of the best schools and multi academy trusts in England. This comes from £65m of new funding, with the hubs

set to run for an initial three years.

The 81 new hubs will be rolled out in addition to the six existing test & learn TSH which were set up last year.

The hubs will also help in delivering the Early Career Framework reforms when this is available nationally from September 2021, as well as in delivering a reformed suite of National Professional Qualifications (NPQs) including new specialist NPQs. They will also deliver Initial Teaching Training and additional high-quality evidence based professional development.

Richard Gill, Teaching School Council chair, said: "The Teaching Schools Council congratulates all 81 schools and/or trusts which have been designated as a teaching school hub. They will form a national network of excellence in teacher training and development.

To see your Catholic school or college featured in *The Catholic Universe*, send your stories in to **Michael Winterbottom** at michael.winterbottom@thecatholicuniverse.com or call him on 07949 987771

Education

Keeping the faith in Catholic education

Ratcliffe College headmaster Jonathan Reddin highlights the challenges that face Catholic schools to retain their true identity during lockdown and when schools reopen, and the opportunity the pandemic has provided for school leaders to reflect and re-shape the way schools help young people encounter God in their lives.

At a time when the role of leading our schools feels consumed by the ever-changing challenges of the pandemic, considering how best to engage students with their faith on their eventual return to the classroom may not be at the forefront of every headteacher's mind right now.

Pressures to manage and support the day-to-day needs of students and colleagues, as well as negotiating the trials of remote learning, may leave little time and energy left to contemplate and plan too far ahead. With schools closed to most students, and churches until recently closed to congregations, where do young people seek and receive spiritual nourishment in these uncertain times? How do we, as Catholic leaders, prevent the physical separation from the daily routines of Catholic life and collective worship in our schools from creating a permanent vacuum for many young people, forever separating them from their spiritual roots?

Sadly, for the majority of our children, Catholic or not, school continues to represent their only experience of Church and our faith. How do we protect that experience in the future?

What will post-pandemic look like?

Remote learning has led to an inevitable increase in on-screen time.

External agencies report increases in cyber-bullying, as well as other forms of inappropriate use of technology among children and young people. When schools do eventually reopen, what will the legacy of the pandemic be for this generation of young people in terms of their spiritual growth and development, as well as their formal education?

These are the questions that I'm sure many

headteachers and leaders in Catholic schools have been wrestling with since lockdown was announced last March. I know I have. As disruption to learning has extended into a second academic year, these questions have taken on greater importance for us all. As we await further announcements on the reopening of schools almost a year since lockdown 1.0, our collective ability as leaders to keep Christ at the centre of all that we do for, and on behalf of, our students must not be overlooked or buried under the tangle of operational 'priorities.' Instead, our Catholic mission must remain at the focal point of our decision-making; it must be at the very tip of the lance we carry as we forge ahead in the post-lockdown era.

Continuing to deliver our mission

Our faith and our belief in the Catholic identity of our schools will be tested further in the coming months; I don't believe that we will simply return to our normal routines without consequences to the faith journey of our children and young people. However, I do believe that the current crisis presents Catholic schools with a unique opportunity to revisit our mission and to re-shape the way in which we present our faith to young people in the future. Now is a chance to consider doing things differently. If we have

learnt one lesson from the pandemic, it is that we must adapt

quickly if we are to succeed. To ensure our faith is strengthened by our recent experiences rather than



Ratcliffe College resides in 200 acres of beautiful, rolling Leicestershire countryside.

More at www.ratcliffecollege.com

being irreparably damaged by it, I urge all Catholic leaders to ask how their schools are currently making Christ known within their school community? The answer to this question will surely help to inform how their school is delivering its mission and how their decisions are informed by it.

Amidst the business of mass testing, teacher-assessed grades and continuing to operate in bubbles, Christ and his presence in the lives of our children must remain central to our thinking and a priority within our daily routines.

How has Ratcliffe developed its Catholic identity?

Since January, Ratcliffe has worked very hard to maintain and develop its Catholic identity throughout the college, from our youngest children in our Nursery to our Year 13 students. We have prioritised the importance of beginning all our online staff briefings with prayer, led by a member of the common room. We have witnessed so many beautiful prayers each day, many written by staff members themselves.

Tutor time and registration begin with a prayer, led by a student or their teacher. All our online formal meetings, of which there are dozens each week, including student voice as well as staff-led meetings and governor meetings, begin with a prayer or reflection. Our commitment to daily prayer, despite the physical separation of lockdown, has enabled colleagues to put Christ at the centre of our daily lives and promote the value of prayer to the students.

Our Chaplaincy team has been very active throughout lockdown, meeting fortnightly to tackle fundamental questions regarding the way in which our school fulfils its Catholic Mission. In doing so, the college continues the important work of reshaping

the way in which we will help our students encounter God in their lives in the coming weeks, months and years ahead.

Weekly whole school assemblies in the Senior School as well as Key Stage assemblies in our Preparatory and Nursery settings, have enabled the whole college community to hear the word of God through scripture and Bible readings appropriate to the liturgical calendar.

The college focuses on a different Gospel value each half-term. From January, we concentrated on the importance of charity, which dovetailed so well with our whole college fundraising walk to raise money for YoungMinds, a charity dedicated to supporting positive mental health for young people. Our aptly named, 'Hike to Bethlehem' where we collectively walked the equivalent distance from our school to the place of Jesus's birth, was completed on the penultimate day of the Autumn Term and provided our Sixth Form students with an opportunity to live out their faith, putting the needs of others before themselves by organising a whole college charity event. All students and staff walked in bubbles in fancy dress! It was a huge success, raising £7k for our chosen charity and highlighting just what can be achieved when we put Christ at the centre of our lives.

Our boarding community living in school, although somewhat depleted in number, continues to meet for night prayer under the guidance of our chaplain and lay chaplain. These occasions continue to support their faith journey through prayer and personal reflection.

As we enter the season of Lent, the Gospel value for this coming half-term is forgiveness. This Gospel value will inform all our prayers and assemblies, as well as our charitable and pastoral work to ensure that we

continue to remind students of the importance of having and celebrating our faith.

These activities are hardly groundbreaking, nor do they represent perhaps anything more than what other schools are doing or have done. The reason is to underline their importance to our Catholic identity to the young people in our care, regardless of whether we are physically in school or not. Prayer signifies hope, and hope signifies a desire for something and expectation of receiving it; the virtue is hoping for Divine union and so eternal happiness. While faith is a function of the intellect, hope is an act of the will. At a time of such uncertainty and separation from so many of the anchor points that our schools provide young people, prayer is a powerful act of hope and one which must be practised daily.

In an increasingly secular world, dominated by the constant noise of the internet and social media, Catholic schools must use the disruption of the pandemic as an opportunity to refresh the way in which they evangelise culture by addressing the deepest questions about what it is to be human and live in society. We must use this opportunity to re-evaluate the ways in which we open young people's minds to the transcendent dimension of life and the reality of God revealed in Jesus Christ.

As Catholic schools, we have the opportunity to begin a fresh page and re-write the way we teach a holistic understanding of the human person and society in which all are included so that humanity can flourish. As Catholic schools, we have the opportunity to re-think the ways in which we help each child to develop their God-given gifts and talents in order to engage in building a better society, post pandemic, which is characterised by justice, truth and love. And so, as we enter the next phase of the pandemic, remember to make time to re-evaluate the mission of your school and how best to keep the faith.

• Ratcliffe College is an independent Catholic day and boarding school for children aged 3-18. Ratcliffe has a long and rich tradition in educating young people in the Catholic Faith, based on the teachings of its founder, Blessed Antonio Rosmini. More at www.ratcliffecollege.com



Ratcliffe College Headmaster Jonathan Reddin



We have the opportunity to re-think the ways in which we help each child to develop their God-given gifts in order to build a better society, post pandemic, which is characterised by justice, truth and love.

Fast from indifference during communal heartbreak

Claire Lucas

I know that I am not the only one for whom this year has been full of unpredictable moments. More than anything, this year has reminded me how completely out of control I am. I've found myself especially drawn to the changing of the seasons, I think, in part, because of the predictability they've offered.

As Advent and then Christmas rolled on, I found myself saying: "Yes! Change. But at least this one I can predict." I craved a "normal" Advent after a year that had felt so unjustly unusual.

Just like our incarnate God of unconditional love who we encountered at Christmas, the seasons, both liturgical and natural, meet us exactly where we are. There is something so deeply comforting about this. Whether we feel ready for them or not, they arrive, just as they have every year.

It is inarguable that this Lent meets us in a place of profound personal and communal suffering and loss, of unending uncertainty and

anxiety, of unanswered prayers.

God's heart breaks with ours as we grieve for all that is and has been lost without explanation during the past year: hugs from those we love, the countless lives of family and friends, space together for ritual and grieving at the time when we need it the most.

What can we fast from when it feels like we've already given up so much?

I am still shaken and grieving, and I feel my heart hardening to the suffering that surrounds me, particularly the lives lost of those I love. I know I am not alone in saying that I am angry and hurting as we journey through this Lenten season.

The only semblance of an answer that I have right now is, this Lent, let us resist the temptations to move past the suffering we have experienced. Now is not the time for finding inauthentic silver linings when our hearts need to break open for ourselves and for one another.

Pope Francis reminds us that as disciples of Jesus, living in a broken world plagued with the failures of



(above) South Korean Cardinal Andrew Yeom Soo-jung, centre, and Fr Francis Kim, left, pour soup into a container at the soup kitchen in Myongdong Cathedral in Seoul on 22nd January. Authentic fasting, the prophet Isaiah suggests, is setting free the oppressed, feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, caring for the sick, sheltering the homeless. (Catholic News Service photo/courtesy Archdiocese of Seoul)

(below) A woman wearing a protective mask prays during Mass at the Church of the Sacred Heart in Amman, Jordan, on 6th January, 2020, during the Covid-19 pandemic. It is inarguable that this Lent meets us in a place of profound personal and communal suffering and loss, of unending uncertainty and anxiety, of unanswered prayers. (CNS photo/Muhammad Hamed, Reuters)



capitalism and indifference we are operating from within a toxic "throwaway culture" that sees unwanted items and people as inconvenient and therefore, disposable.

Inexplicable hurt is inconvenient. It is easy from within this culture for our hearts be hardened, to become indifferent and apathetic to the suffering of those around us.

Imagine the heart of God during this time, a heart that both breaks at the suffering of the world and that still continually reaches out after each and every one of us, continuously falling in love with us, flaws and all.

In Pope Francis' 2015 Lenten mes-

sage, he said: "Let us all ask the Lord ... make our hearts like yours." This invitation remains even more relevant today.

Our model for how to hold the immense suffering and the grief of this time and to continue to reach out in love is the heart of God. We pray: Create in us hearts that are both broken and built, tender and vulnerable and yet unafraid, constantly reaching out.

This Lent is the time to fast from indifference and from the temptation to turn inwards when the world needs our tender and broken open love.

Yes, we must care for ourselves. We must carry our own grief and hurt, knowing always that this care is not self-serving, but rather, through this care, we are better able to be broken open in love for those around us and for the entirety of our human family.

God, our companion, may this Lent bring us closer to your heart. May our fasting from indifference, from hopelessness, from apathy, make us better able to love one another more fiercely and authentically and honestly. May our hearts at the end of this Lent more closely resemble yours. Amen.

Nuns continue border work during pandemic

Did you know there's a network of 642,000 Catholic Sisters around the world, many of them on the frontlines of Covid-19? Nuns have a long history of standing alongside some of the most vulnerable communities during times of great need, doing the doable to protect them as fiercely as they can.

Soli Salgado and Nuri Vallbona

At the Gateway International Bridge that links Brownsville, Texas, to Matamoros, Mexico, a group of volunteers and Catholic sisters pull portable carts with nappies, tents, food and supplies. They cross the border into Mexico on foot, a small caravan of about 10-20 people. Their destination is the migrant camp on the other side, where asylum-seekers wait in tents for their chance to plead their cases before an immigration judge.

As the pandemic rages around the United States, most people curtail their social interactions to minimise their risk. These sisters, many in their 70s, have taken on more.

"They would provide a shoulder to lean on, provide the people an opportunity to tell their story (and) of course, a lot of hugs and kisses and spiritual, moral support," said Sergio Cordova, co-founder of Team Brownsville, a non-profit that provides aid to immigrants on the US-Mexico border.

After the Trump administration enacted the Migrant Protection Protocols, or the "Remain in Mexico" policy, in January 2019, more than 60,000 asylum-seekers, a third of whom were children, were forced to wait for their US court dates on the Mexican side of the US-Mexico border. As a result, informal camps emerged.

As sisters accompany those in migrant shelters, take donations to those in camps and orphanages, or host immigrants along the border, they hear firsthand the tragic stories that forced people to flee for the United States seeking asylum, only to be deported instead. For those who qualify, immigration proceedings are on a loop of delays or cancellations – made more dangerous by the pandemic.

"Each time, they go (to court) with

the hope of some kind of answer of what comes next, and it ends up being a cycle of court dates," said Sister Christa Parra, an Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary sister in El Paso, Texas, who accompanies asylum-seekers in a migrant shelter in Juárez, Mexico.

"The system is set up to discourage people from waiting," she said. "So, waiting is a form of resistance."

Sister Norma Pimentel, executive director of Catholic Charities of the Rio Grande Valley, said she believes authorities from both countries have "utilised the virus to their advantage." The encampment in Matamoros, which at one point surpassed 3,000 migrants in 2019 because of changing immigration policy and border restrictions from the pandemic, now contains about 500, according to Global Response Management, a non-profit that provides medical services in the camp.

The governments aren't considering "the good or the safety of the families," but rather, the responsibilities they don't want to shoulder, said Sr Norma, a 67-year-old Missionaries of Jesus sister. "They find it more convenient to just say: 'Nobody's allowed to enter the United States' or 'Nobody's allowed to enter the camp anymore.'"

That worries her. She knows well the many stories of immigrants fleeing violence and says meeting them is always an emotional encounter.

"We rejoice, and we can see the tears in their eyes, how happy they are, (but) at the same time how difficult it had been, how they struggled, how they feared something could happen to them, and then finally being in the US," she said. "There's a sense of joy."

Andrea Leiner, director of strategic planning for Global Response Management and an emergency medicine nurse practitioner, praised Sr Norma's ability to connect with immigrants and co-ordinate aid. When Mexico did not ask the United Nations to manage the camp, a usual practice when large numbers of refugees gather, Sr Norma stepped into the vacuum that emerged, she said.

"Sr Norma really stepped into one of the leadership roles," Leiner said. She co-ordinated local government and aid organisations to form a "cohesive strategy" and to help shape an "effective response."

Sr Norma said the camps are a difficult place to start a new life. The tents are freezing at night, and migrants' bodies ache from months of sleeping on the ground. The days are typically hot, wet and muddy, and rats have infested the encampment.

"The truth is, people on (the US) side have no idea what it's like to live there, the daily suffering," said Rosa, 28, a hydroelectric operator who fled north for her safety with her four-year-old son. "This is not a life for

anyone. ... Everyone who has passed through there is marked by it."

Sr Christa's daily round-trip drive from her home in El Paso to a shelter in Juárez has become a sacred part of her day, a reminder of the stark realities that straddle the international border.

Since last October, she has been accompanying asylum-seekers in Juárez who, because of the Migrant Protection Protocols, await their ever-delayed court dates.

"There can be a feeling of despair," she said. Simply weighing their few options – to wait out the case or to risk danger, either by crossing illegally or returning to the lives they fled – "is overwhelming to think about."

At the shelter, Sr Christa's rotating duties include teaching nightly English classes, offering pastoral accompaniment or connecting migrants with humanitarian legal services. Their biggest need, she said, is making sense of their cases and documentation.

"It's a lot of listening throughout the day, not just with my ears, but with my heart," she said.

On the opposite end of the same Texas-Mexico border, Sister Thérèse Cunningham, 75, teaches English-as-a-second-language classes and life skills to immigrants at La Posada Providencia in San Benito, Texas.

La Posada is an emergency shelter sponsored by the Sisters of Divine Providence of Pittsburgh; it hosts refugees, asylum-seekers and those fleeing life-threatening conditions. Most are homeless, having left their families and home countries because of violence.

"There have been times when I have been at the table with at least 13 different countries represented," said Sr Thérèse, a Sister of the Holy Spirit and Mary Immaculate.

Before the pandemic, Sr Thérèse and another sister from her community gave lessons in a room that held about 12 people. Now, they teach one-on-one. They enforce quarantines, masks and social distancing and had not had an outbreak by mid-January.

Although Covid-19 death counts are rising in Texas, Sr Thérèse, an Irish immigrant, is determined to continue the work she began 15 years ago, helping people like the 19-year-old Somali who got his GED diploma in three months and is now working in Kentucky.

Although some sisters have worked along the border for years, Sister Jacinta Powers, 66, and Sister Mary Alice McCabe, 79, had shorter missions, crossing daily to the Matamoros camp. Sr Jacinta, an Ursuline Sister of Mount St Joseph and registered nurse, went to treat the sick; Sr Mary Alice, a Sister of Notre Dame de Namur, delivered supplies. Both have since returned to their communities for different reasons.



Sister Norma Pimentel, executive director of Catholic Charities of the Rio Grande Valley, centre, pictured in an undated photo, says she is always deliberate about visiting families and sharing a meal on her trips to the migrant camp in Matamoros, Mexico, during the Covid-19 pandemic.

When Sr Jacinta arrived at the border in January 2020, Covid-19 had not yet reached the United States. Six days a week, she crossed Brownsville's Gateway International Bridge, treating skin rashes and gastrointestinal issues.

Although coronavirus cases increased across the United States, the illness didn't affect as many in the camp.

"Nobody got that sick," though approximately 10 per cent tested positive for Covid-19, Sr Jacinta said. She credits the flow of fresh air around the campers – and the hand of God.

"There's no way those folks would have not had some really, really sick people with Covid like you see in the States except for God's divine intervention," Sr Jacinta said.

When Covid-19 cases erupted in the spring of 2020 and cross-border travel was limited to essential workers, Sr Mary Alice said, she and her team were labelled non-essential and could not cross. They returned to their communities but kept their mobile home, hoping to return.

As a nurse, Sr Jacinta is considered essential and continued her treks to the camp until her mission ended last November.

One particular little girl caught her attention, a two-year-old from Guatemala who inconsolably cried: "Mamá, Mamá!" She learned the little girl's mother was killed on the way to the United States. Her uncle drowned in the Rio Grande, and her grandfather was later killed in Guatemala.

Despite all this, the faith of the girl's great-grandmother never wavered, something Sr Jacinta said she saw again and again in the camp.

"It provided me such a witness of people's faith in God that they would

depend on God for such bare existence," Sr Jacinta said. "Their joy just radiated out of sparks I would see every day."

After her mission ended, she returned to her community in Maple Mount, Kentucky, inspired by the "sense of brotherhood" she witnessed.

Sr Mary Alice said she and her sisters currently donate funds to non-profits working with immigrants. They faithfully watch the news, hoping for changes that would allow them to continue their work.

"We are not young women, and we can't get on a plane and fly down," Sr Mary Alice said. But "if the border opens, we'll just drive down and get there."

Undeterred by surging Covid-19 cases, Sister Ursula Herrera, 72, continues to cross the Rio Grande, making regular food and supply deliveries to a home for special-needs adults and an orphanage in Piedras Negras, Mexico. Despite her age, Sr Ursula, a Benedictine Sister of Boerne, Texas, returns again and again. If someone at one of the homes has a potential Covid-19 exposure, she is always warned to stay away, she said.

Sr Ursula said she feels a responsibility to those she serves. Among them are the 23 special-needs adults at Casa Bethesda to whom she delivers food, money, diapers and daily supplies such as trash bags.

"She's a companion on the path, but she's no ordinary companion; she's like an angel to us," said the Rev. Paulino Esquivel, the Baptist pastor who founded the home 26 years ago.

Although donors come and go, Rev. Esquivel said Sr Ursula has never abandoned them.

"She comes representing her God and my God," Rev. Esquivel said.



Ursuline Sister Jacinta Powers, a registered nurse, puts a mask on a child at the migrant camp in Matamoros, Mexico, so the girl could go to school.

Vitamins for skin health

Vitamins are essential for achieving a bright complexion. Dr Des Fernandes explains the vitamins we should be including in our skincare regimen.



HEALTH

Dr Des Fernandes, a leading cosmetic surgeon, believes that skin needs daily replenishment of vitamins and antioxidants to fight the effects of photoageing, ageing which is caused by exposure to sunlight.

With people living longer and healthier lives, the demand for such products has never been greater says Fernandes, a leading cosmetic surgeon based in Cape Town, South Africa. He believes that skin needs daily replenishment of vitamins and antioxidants to counter the effect.

He claims that photoageing is really a skin disease caused by vitamin deficiencies. Exposure to sunlight destroys vitamins A, E and C and beta carotene in the skin. The treatment for photoageing, he says, is to supply the skin with what has been lost though exposure to UV light. The skin ages because we lose essential light-sensitive vitamins every time we go out into sunlight" he

"Exposure to sunlight destroys vitamins A, E and C and beta carotene in the skin."



Dr Des Fernandes

says. "The scientific method to counteract this damage is to replace the lost vitamins every single day, preferably in both the morning and evening time."

Vitamin A is the key to healthy skin

Vitamin A is the key molecule that maintains safe, healthy skin and it should be used by every single person on this planet in order to neutralise the accelerating damage from a thinner ozone layer.

"If there is insufficient vitamin A in the skin, then no matter what cosmetic you put on it, the skin's cells will not be healthy, says Dr Fernandes." Sunlight causes not only a lower concentration of vitamin A in the skin, but also lower blood levels of vitamin A with prolonged exposure. Vitamin C and E are also destroyed by exposure to UV light.

Vitamin C is the key for collagen production

Vitamin C is also essential for the production of collagen and the reduction of pigmentation blemishes, while vitamin E also helps preserve cell walls. Topical vitamin A has long been used in anti-ageing cosmetics as it makes the skin thicker, reduces pigmentation and helps to smooth out the skin. However, Dr Fernandes recommends vitamin A combined with antioxidants for the most effective results. he believes there are two significant rules to revolutionising skin care. First, every skincare regimen should have vitamins A, C, E



Many whole foods are packed with age-fighting vitamins

"Beta carotene is a precursor of Vitamin A but is also a powerful antioxidant itself."

and Beta carotene included

There are two significant rules to revolutionising skin care, he adds. First, every skincare regimen should have vitamins A, C, E and Beta carotene included at least once a day. Beta carotene is a precursor of vitamin A and while is often called vitamin A, but it is also a powerful antioxidant in itself.

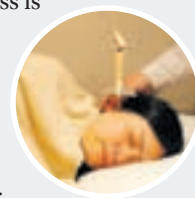
Second, vitamin replenishment should start soon after exposure to sunlight.

In order to protect the skin each day while also allowing for the formation of natural vitamin D, a low SPF should be used for simple 'round the town' sun exposure.

"The low SPF can be augmented, in effect, if the day cream has been fortified by the addition of natural vitamin A and antioxidants. These antioxidants will reduce the damage from UV light," the doctor says.

Ear candling: What is it and does it work?

Hopi ear candling is one of those love it or hate it treatments. Enthusiasts see ear candling as a cure for all number of ills, while others claim that it has changed their lives. Some, however, ask what all the fuss is about?



What is it?

During ear candling the patient lies on his or her side. The therapist simply inserts a long, hollow tube in to the opening of the ear, lights it and holds the candle in place as it burns for around ten minutes. After this the process is repeated in the second ear.

What are the candles made of?

It is a common misconception that ear candles are similar to traditional wax candles. However, they are in fact long tubes of linen, beeswax, honey and often extracts of St John's wort, chamomile and sage.

What is ear candling used for?

Ear candling is most commonly used in complications of the ear such as tinnitus or compacted ear wax/glue ear and while it tends to work well in these cases, it is also equally well suited to complaints of the head and sinuses, including hayfever.

Where does the idea come from?

The tradition appears to be traceable back to the Egyptians while parchment scrolls have also revealed a very similar treatment was traditional in the Orient.

What are the benefits?

In addition to clearing airways and dislodging stubborn ear wax, ear candling can bring a strangely clear feeling to the sinuses and head in patients with colds.

What are the negatives?

Ear candling has come under heavy criticism in the past over safety concerns surrounding the proximity of the candle's flame to one's face. However, if carried out by a professional using the correct equipment, ear candling is perfectly safe.

“

**You definitely need
to plan in advance
– you have to be
prepared**

Martin Stemp,
owner of Portsmouth
based RS Aqua



We're keeping our business moving

The rules on trading with Europe have changed, but these British companies are going from strength to strength under our new relationship with the EU ...

On 1st January, the way we trade with the EU changed. New rules and processes came in affecting firms that import or export to the continent. But while many companies have taken steps to prepare for the changes, some haven't, and that could leave their business at risk of disruption.

Here, two firms that have made the switch reveal their tips and how they have adjusted.

BEING ABLE TO IMPORT SMOOTHLY IS ESSENTIAL TO WHAT WE DO

With his business dependent on successfully importing and exporting millions of pounds of goods every year, Martin Stemp was determined to ensure it continued to run smoothly after the Brexit transition period ended.

The owner of RS Aqua, an ocean technology firm based in Portsmouth,

secured a Government grant to put his staff on a training course to learn how to complete the new customs declarations.

The company also spoke to its shipping companies and suppliers and changed their paperwork to make sure it complied with the new rules. Having exported outside of the EU before, Martin found the new processes quite familiar.

However, he warns: "You definitely need to plan in advance, you have to be prepared. There is a lot [to do], it's not to be sniffed at, but there is support if you need it."

"I suggest working with the Department for International Trade – it has an Export Champions programme – and talking to peers in your industry who are already exporting."

PLANNING IS THE ROOT CAUSE OF OUR BREXIT SUCCESS

Control Techniques recently picked up its Chinese factory, put it on a train across Siberia and relocated it in the Mid Wales countryside, to increase capacity.

It is this commitment to success that led the company, which designs and manufactures electric motor control technology, to start planning two years ago for the end of the Brexit transition period.

What every firm needs to know about the changes

Even though a deal with the EU has been secured, for UK companies, doing business with and travelling to Europe has changed. There are new rules on exports, imports, tariffs, qualifications, hiring and travel that you need to follow or your plans could face disruption. To give businesses more time to prepare, new border controls are being introduced in three phases.

If your business imports from the EU, you need to check the new requirements that will start in April and July, and make sure you are ready.

To make things easier, businesses can use the Brexit checker tool at gov.uk/transition for a personalised list of actions.

The website also contains a host of other helpful information including a 'Check an HGV is ready' service for hauliers, dedicated helplines, webinars with policy experts, step-by-step guides and video explainers.

KEEP YOUR BUSINESS MOVING

New rules now apply to business with Europe. Act now at GOV.UK/TRANSITION

"We export to 77 countries, so we had to be well prepared," says president Anthony Pickering (right).

"We made sure our suppliers were ready and had contingency plans in place, for example, if the port at Dover became blocked. They had to prove that their suppliers also had a plan, reaching all the way back down the supply chain."

"Planning has been the reason for our success since 1st January, because we're reliant on our supply chain. Our factories are full – we're absolutely fl at out, with orders com-



ing out of our ears.

"We've not missed a beat, and our business is continuing to evolve. There are some delays thanks to logistics, but I think it will figure itself out."

Planning in advance is the key to export success



VISIT GOV.UK/TRANSITION



Keep your business moving

Doing business with Europe has changed and new rules apply. Find out more at gov.uk/transition

All together >

The people working tirelessly to deliver pathway to a normal life

The Covid-19 vaccination programme is an inspiring collaborative effort that is unique in our history

The whole of the UK is working together to roll out the Covid-19 vaccine. From the scientists developing effective vaccines to the warehouse workers ensuring stock is stored safely and distributed around the country, the UK vaccination is an inspiring collective effort across the four nations.

The UK Government has secured over 457 million doses of vaccines and has multiple vaccines approved for use. Millions of people have already received their first dose, with those most at risk first in line.

The UK Government has made available more than £6 billion to develop and secure Covid-19 vaccines, and it is now distributing doses to health services in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, as well as the Crown Dependencies and Overseas Territories.

After becoming the first country to approve a vaccine for use, we now have three authorised Covid-19 vaccines. Those approved have met strict standards of safety, quality and effectiveness set out by the independent Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA). They are available locally across the UK, and provided free.

At the heart of the biggest vaccination programme in NHS history are thousands of scientists, medics, Armed Forces personnel, logistics staff and volunteers who make it all possible.

Read their inspiring stories...

Rajan Bindra, 44, is an aviation consultant, who lives in Slough, Berkshire, with his wife and two children. He worked as a volunteer at the local vaccination centre.

"I was in charge of managing the car park, which is the first port of call for anybody who comes along."

I wanted people to see my smiling eyes behind a mask so they were put at ease.

"We made a point of referring to them as 'customers' or 'guests' to treat everyone with respect. I was there when my 80-year-old mother (pictured with Rajan) arrived for her vaccination."

I thought, 'Do I need to ask for her ID?' – I did anyway. But then she asked if I could park her car for her. I had to tell her we weren't offering a valet service!"



PROFESSOR SAUL FAUST is director of the NIHR Southampton Clinical Research Facility at the University of Southampton.

"During the pandemic, I have focused on delivering trials of vaccines, treatments and diagnostic tests across the Wessex region."

"Without the vaccine, we will not be able to prevent further waves and the impact that has on the NHS."

"I work in national networks and groups to make best use of the superb UK clinical research infrastructure, which has delivered almost all of the global scientific advances in Covid-19."

"It has been a huge collaborative effort across the whole of the UK."



LIEUTENANT CALUM MACLEOD,

27, serves with the Royal Scots Dragoon Guards in Leuchars, Fife, and has been involved in setting up vaccination centres.

"We're doing anything from helping to lay flooring, to moving chairs and tables around. We have been on task now for just under two weeks."

"It's a vast effort by everyone involved. I'm from the local area so it feels good to be getting these vaccinations out."

"A lot of my soldiers are really happy and motivated to be helping out communities across Scotland. The Army brings organisational capacity and a can-do attitude to the task."



ROYAL NAVY RESERVIST LT CDR RUTH FLEMING, 46, helped

coordinate a team of military personnel building a vaccination centre in Merthyr Tydfil, South Wales.

"My work as a logistics officer included making sure the team was fit and well and where the government wanted them to be. All the military are can-do people and

help bring new perspectives."

"I'm usually a data scientist at Swansea University, and while on deployment I could still commute home to see my husband and two young kids. I'm really proud to have done my bit, and I will be at the front of the queue as soon as I get the opportunity to have the vaccine myself! My in-laws have already had it and my parents will have it soon."



MAJOR CHARLIE MARTELL was the Officer Commanding for the construction of a vaccination centre at Fort Regent in Jersey, which can now deliver 1,500 doses a day.

"That wasn't a strict mobilisation, but a case of gathering local reservists and asking, 'Can you turn up and build a mass vaccination centre?'"

"We had a good response – it was a very effective local solution to a local problem. Building the centre took 10 days with 20 reservists. We were working flat out from when the site opened at 7am to when it closed at 7pm. It was very quick because we were able to start at a moment's notice."



PROFESSOR PAUL HEATH, of the University of London, oversaw Phase 3 trials at St George's Hospital, London, of a UK Government-backed vaccine produced by US pharmaceutical company Novavax. The vaccine has now passed Phase 3.

"The Novavax trial involves around 15,200 participants at 33 sites across England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. This is a double blind, randomised, placebo-controlled trial to understand whether the vaccine has a significant efficacy against Covid-19."

"Once that's been done – and obviously ensuring that the vaccine is safe – the data will be presented to the regulator, who will consider whether they want to provide an emergency licence. It is good to have lots of different vaccines because we have a lot of people to vaccinate."



DAVID LAWRENCE is Chief Financial Officer at Valneva, which is developing a vaccine in Livingston, West Lothian. The biotech company is one of eight vaccine developers that the UK Government has struck usage agreements with.

"The next wave of clinical trials will involve around 3,000 to 4,000 people to make sure there is enough data to confidently understand the vaccine's safety and efficacy. Rather than just doing small-scale manufacturing to produce the initial material for the clinical trials, we're now using a full-scale manufacturing process."

"That means that if the regulator gives its approval the vaccine could be deployed the day after. We're taking a risk now that means we can potentially deliver the vaccine faster, and supply the 100 million doses we promised the UK in time."



IN ASSOCIATION WITH THE UK GOVERNMENT

Working together



CORPORAL SALLY WOODCOCK, a 34-year-old RAF clarinettist, was deployed to a vaccine hub in Powys, Mid Wales.

"I'm not one to sit about doing nothing, so it's fantastic that I've been able to help out. In Powys, I'm with five other musicians and a pilot.

"We've been doing all sorts. It can vary depending on how many volunteers there are, but today I was

doing car park duties.

"I've also been carrying out admin roles and operating the phones.

"We're all mucking in together – there's no kind of division between the military and volunteers.

"I received a jab myself because we were working with the public and alongside nurses. It was absolutely painless."

HOW DOES THE VACCINE WORK?

- Vaccines are the best way to protect people from coronavirus and will save tens of thousands of lives.
- As more people are vaccinated, more people will be protected from the harmful effects of COVID-19.
- Vaccines work by tricking your body into thinking it has to fight the virus. It trains your immune system for this fight by stimulating you to create antibodies and T-cells.
- This means that when Covid-19 is encountered naturally, the body has already been prepared to protect against it.
- However, like any training, getting up to 'match fitness' takes time. Your body's response, the immune response, is only trained up around 2 or 3 weeks after you have your first jab. You do not have the full protection from the first dose in this period. If you are older, it's better to allow at least 3 weeks.



- Even better and longer lasting protection then comes from the second dose so it is really important that everyone gets the second jab. Again, the protective effect from that jab will come weeks after it is given.
- For more information on vaccination Please visit [Gov.uk/coronavirus](https://gov.uk/coronavirus)

For more information go to:

gov.uk/coronavirus

DEIDRE WEBB, 57, from Belfast, is director of nursing at the Public Health Agency Northern Ireland and managed the rollout of the vaccination programme to care homes. "The care homes have gone through such hard times, so we were committed to deploying the vaccine there as soon as possible. All our care homes have now received the first doses. Within our care homes and clinics the people who allow us to work effectively are the house porters, the drivers, the cleaners, as well as the volunteers. They are the unsung heroes. I am going to be trained as a vaccinator as well so I can't wait for that. But at the moment I am involved in the planning. I lead on the workforce and logistics part of the programme."



DID YOU KNOW?

- After becoming the first country to approve a vaccine for use, the UK Government has bought vaccines on behalf of all parts of the UK and distributed them around Wales, England, Scotland and Northern Ireland.
- Today we have three authorised vaccines for COVID-19; more than any other country in the world. Our priority is to save as many lives as possible, as quickly as possible, while also reducing the hospitalisations that are creating such pressure on the NHS.
- The UK are vaccinating more than double the rate per person, per day, than any other country in Europe.
- The Covid-19 vaccination programme is the biggest vaccination programme in NHS history and we've protected more people through vaccinations than all other countries in Europe put together.
- Across the UK, millions of people have received at least the first dose of their COVID-19 vaccine, with those
- NHS England and NHS Improvement, NHS Wales, NHS Scotland, and Health and Social Care Northern Ireland have decades of experience in delivering large-scale vaccination programmes, while the Army continues to support the delivery of vaccines across the UK - from Aberystwyth to Aberdeen.
- Approved vaccines will continue to be available across the UK, free at the point of delivery, according to need, not ability to pay.
- The UK Government has successfully procured vaccines on behalf of all parts of the country and working with Devolved Administrations to prioritise citizens who are at greatest risk.
- Vaccination will be managed by the health services in each nation: NHS England and NHS Improvement, NHS Wales, NHS Scotland, and Health and Social Care Northern Ireland. The UK government is working closely with the Devolved Administrations to ensure an aligned approach to COVID-19 vaccine deployment across the UK
- The UK Government has invested more than £300m into manufacturing any successful vaccine and has bought vaccines on behalf of the Devolved Administrations, Crown Dependencies and Overseas Territories at no charge.
- So far, the UK Government has secured access to a total of 457 million vaccine doses for all the nations of the UK through agreements with eight separate vaccine developers, giving the UK the best chance of securing a safe and effective vaccine at the quickest speed.



Working together to vaccinate the UK

Across the UK, people are working together to deliver the COVID-19 vaccine. Learn more at gov.uk/coronavirus

All together >

Unpredictable rhythms composed by chance

Virtuoso pianist Edward Chilvers devised an incredible dice and mathematical chart system to follow nature, not convention, in recording his new album, *31 Pieces*.

NICK'S MUSIC PICKS

The Music Scene

By Nick Benson

"Conventional Western music is like a statue, my music is like a tree". A bold statement perhaps, but one that Edward Chilvers justifies on his forthcoming album, *31 Pieces*.

While the album, factually, is made up of '31 pieces', Chilvers sees the work not as something that is or should be broken into segments but rather something that has been conceived and executed as a contiguous whole with elements fading into one another, with silence or inertia never gaining the upper hand. The music on *31 Pieces* will never be performed twice in exactly the same way. The music captured on the three CD release itself serves as the 'parent' version – while each of the three CDs works as a standalone record, together they have a deeper unity.

The foundation of Chilvers' work is in experimenting with speed ratios and mode, and its DNA is coded with the infinite variety that reflects that existing within nature. When he rolls his dice, the unpredictability generated rages within the strictures of the format that he has created. A statue, by contrast, is immutable and a competent pianist will always play a traditionally formed piece in the same predictable and perfect way. A tree can be recognisably an oak, but each one is different due to the impact of myriad variables like wind, or soil type.

Chilvers uses unique technical and theoretical tools to both liberate and structure his compositions which use – principally – multi-tempo patterns and tonal mode systems as the roots of the pieces. A dice system is often used to randomise these variables and many of the 31 pieces grew out of these dice rolls.

The whole process is built on defined combinations of ratios that has led him to nothing less than a form of 'New Music'. Sky News called the process "fascinating to watch", while *BBC Radio 4's Today* programme called him a "Musical dice man creating pieces driven by randomness". The hope is that these skills will become normal technique for the pianists of the future, and a freer 'multi-dimensional' way of playing will blossom and evolve.

"The hope is that these skills will become normal technique for the pianists of the future."

Chilvers was a driven and passionate player who practised constantly in pursuit of that perfection. He hated school and left as soon as he could, spending the next 12 years chasing perfection before what he describes as his dawning "recalibration".

As he says, "This is a leap forward from mono-tempo music, which faces the same fate as black and white film, though it will remain a beautiful part of the musical universe".

It is an analogy that bears inspection: speed and pattern are what defines both music and light – and the 'red' in a colour film only appears so because of wave speed. Multi-tempo music is so packed with possibility that the only reason that it is not already omnipresent is down to the simple fact, as Chilvers' methods prove, that it is so difficult!

These explorations in harmony categorise scales and modes into 96 modal groups and are an example of Chilvers' innate ability to see patterns where others do not.



31 Pieces is the result of his performances at one specific period of time; every time he sits down to play he creates something new. The tracks on the album fade in and fade out to reflect the constant state of transition, on the album and, indeed, in life. Each recorded piece is in truth a snapshot of a piece of music that is constructed in a way that forms a loop and so in reality is infinitely long, and coloured by both character and characteristic, like seasons on a distant planet.

While the approach taken by Chilvers on this album may seem, at first look, more akin to the recent feature written for *The Guardian* by AI than a free-flowing jam session at his beloved Glastonbury – he always attends and performs on pop-up stages – in fact the opposite is true. By scoring a victory over conventional structure he is now blazing his own trail. Chilvers started by playing up to four different tempos simultaneously, disguising the pulse in his music by using phase patterns deliberately contrasting to the tempos; moving away from conventional rhythmical form. He then began to compose beautiful etudes as an exploration in poly-tempo, taking a rich understanding and reverence for western classical harmony; and reshaping it.

As he says himself, "I wanted to create a multi-dimensional music to reflect the unspeakable experience of the stilled mind. I'm trying to make laws: polyrhythmic laws,

Edward's process involves using a dice system to randomise variables. Many of the tracks on '31 Pieces' grew out of these dice rolls.

© Ben Dowden.

phasing laws, modal laws, structural laws. If I can make good laws then something interesting or beautiful should come out".

31 Pieces, then, represents not only a beautiful album that hangs together as a whole, but the rolling back of boundaries. Chilvers draws inspiration from a myriad of influences, from Bach, Wagner and Beethoven through to Boards of Canada, Squarepusher, Radiohead and Meshuggah. However, it was the Bwiti music of Gabon in West Africa, with its incessant, intense use of poly-tempo via harp, voice and drums, that inspired him to seek to stretch the capacity of what is humanly possible to play on the piano.

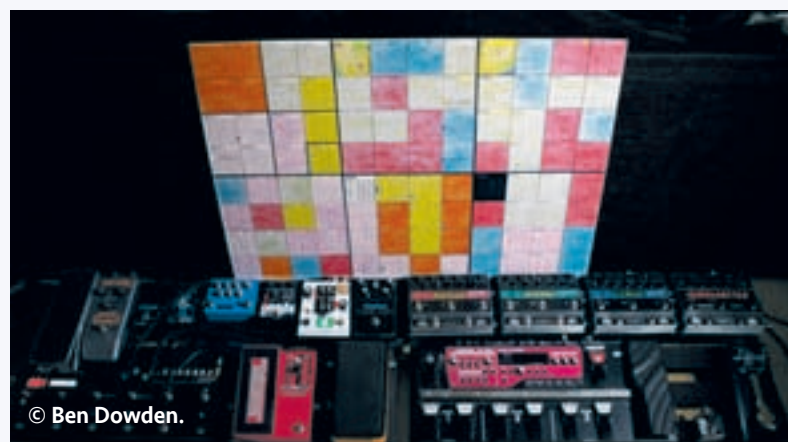
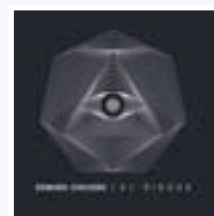
A truly remarkable talent, Chilvers puts discovery and fun at the heart of everything he does – but this is a serious business. Picasso said: "Learn the rules like a pro, so you can break them like an artist." That perhaps sums up this unique musician. His ground-breaking approach



is captured in *11 Pieces*, a beautiful short film essentially encapsulating the concept of the album by blending performance footage and captivating scenes from nature and the built environment. *11 Pieces* has been entered at prestigious film festivals and will also be made available next year.

Chilvers' approach on *31 Pieces* is not a rejection of traditional form or structure, but rather of beginning and endings, constraints and repetition; it is an ongoing reflection of nature. Chilvers frees music in order to allow it to blossom and follow the laws of nature, rather than being trammelled by convention.

• *31 Pieces* by Edward Chilvers is released on 24th March on Mozart Records.



© Ben Dowden.

Pulling out all the stops to restore cathedral's organ

Peter Heneghan

The Grand Organ of Liverpool Metropolitan Cathedral, with its four manuals, 88 speaking stops and 4,565 pipes, is undergoing its first significant renovation since it was installed in 1967, when the cathedral was consecrated and opened for worship.

During the last 54 years, the organ has been heard by millions both on radio and TV and in person, with HM the Queen and Pope John Paul II among its most famous listeners. It has been played by some of the world's most famous organists, including Flor Peeters, Jeanne Demessieux and Olivier Latry, and has featured on numerous CDs and DVDs.

Its primary role, however, has been to enhance the daily services of the cathedral, fulfilling the mandate of Vatican II, which stated that *'[the] pipe organ is to be held in high esteem, for it is the traditional musical instrument which adds a wonderful splendour to the Church's ceremonies and powerfully lifts up man's mind to God and to higher things.'*

Capable of providing gentle aid to prayer or a brassy fanfare for a civic procession, it can accompany anything from a solo chorister to an orchestra and a congregation of thousands.

Completed in 1967 by the English organ builders J W Walker and Sons of Ruislip, the Metropolitan Cathedral organ is recognised as one of the finest examples of classical organ building of the period and is listed Grade I in the British Institute of Organ Studies Listing Scheme. Its most



distinctive feature is the dramatic pipework façade, which was designed by the cathedral architect, Sir Fredrick Gibberd, who arranged an assortment of zinc and wooden pipes with brass trumpets *en chamade* (mounted horizontally) to contrast strikingly with the surrounding concrete pillars.

Just as the profile of the cathedral makes its impact on the Liverpool landscape, so the organ makes its impact visually as one enters the building.

The renovation, anticipated for completion in autumn 2022, will be carried out by Harrison & Harrison Ltd of Durham, one of the leading organ builders in the UK. Its craftsmen have been responsible for restoration work in the cathedrals of

Salisbury, Edinburgh and Lincoln, major work at King's College, Cambridge, the Royal Festival Hall and Westminster Abbey, and new or rebuilt instruments in Canterbury Cathedral and York Minster.

Each one of the 4,565 pipes of the Metropolitan Cathedral organ will be removed, cleaned and restored. The wind system, which has been slowly failing, will be replaced and the electrical components of the organ will be updated to meet current regulatory requirements.

The renovation is primarily being undertaken with the aim of ensuring good mechanical function and safe access for maintenance in the long term, coupled with great care to retain the fine voicing and original tonal qualities of the organ.

Canon Anthony O'Brien, the Dean of the Metropolitan Cathedral, stated: "The Metropolitan Cathedral is a unique building in this country, with many striking and original features. But above all, it is a place of worship and devotion. The organ plays an important role on a daily basis in cathedral life and it is our duty, after over 50 years of service, to ensure that the organ will continue to serve our congregation, and the wider city, for the next 50 years."

The musical tradition at the Metropolitan Cathedral is largely the legacy of brothers Philip Duffy (Master of the Music 1966-1996) and Terence Duffy (Organist 1963-1993). Today, the cathedral has around 60 boy and girl choristers, 14 adult professional singers, a junior choir and



The organ was designed as a centrepiece for the cathedral from the outset

a youth choir, all of whom are regularly accompanied by the organ in offering praise and worship to God.

In recent years the cathedral has begun an organ school, with young people receiving lessons on the cathedral organ, and in turn sharing their talents with their parishes and schools. School groups visiting the cathedral regularly enjoy organ demonstrations.

For Terence Duffy, who as cathedral organist for 30 years played at many of the great occasions since it was opened, the renovation is a long-held desire: "The Walker organ was designed as an integral element of the new cathedral, and it was an honour to have played it on an almost daily basis for over 30 years. But this renovation is overdue and will restore the organ to be worthy of the cathedral and its liturgy."

Dr John Rowntree, organ consultant for the project, said that the renovation will respect the remarkable artistic qualities of the instrument, and in particular the voicing of Denis Thurlow (arguably the most distinguished English voicer of the period). This, coupled with ensuring reliable functioning and safe access for maintenance, "will indeed lift the hearts and minds of future generations coming to the cathedral".

Andrew Reid, managing director of Harrison & Harrison Ltd, the company which will carry out the project, said, "It is an honour for our firm to have the opportunity to renovate the inspirational organ of Liverpool Metropolitan Cathedral.

"The organ is an important instrument of its style and period, and one firmly in harmony with its setting; it is rare to find both cathedral and organ dating from the mid-20th century on such a scale.

"We expect this work, especially the provision of a new wind system, to rejuvenate it."

A major fundraising campaign to support the project will be launched in the near future, and donations towards the initial costs are warmly invited. Full details are available on the cathedral website, and regular updates on the progress of the renovation will be provided by both the cathedral and the organ builders on social media.



Classified/Crossword/Sudoku

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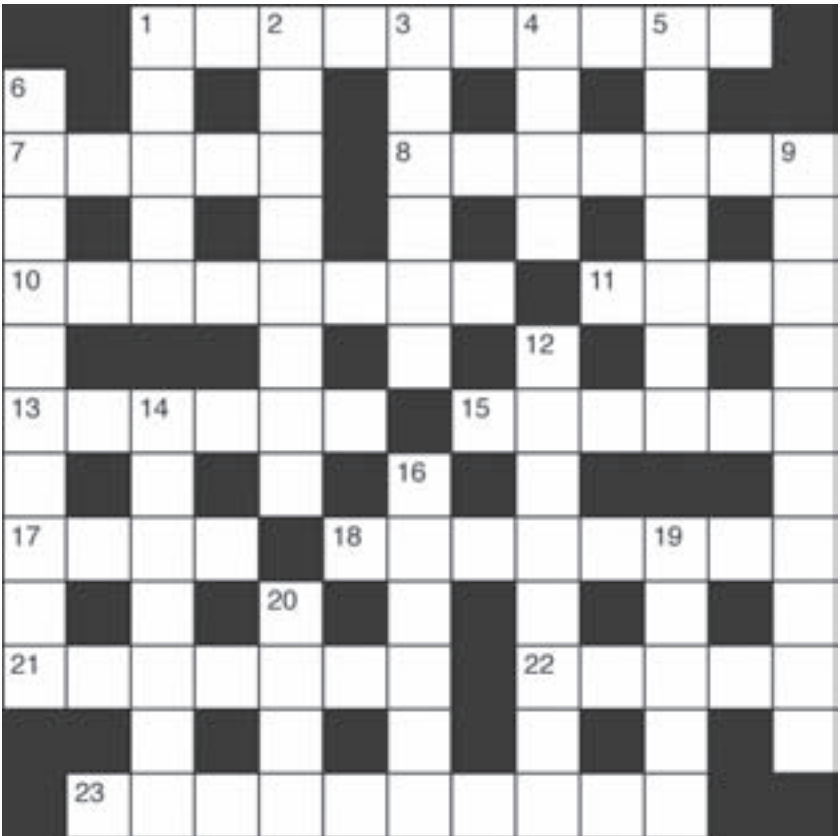
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The Catholic Universe Crossword

No. 687



- Across**
- 1. Raincoat (10)
 - 7. Rapid (5)
 - 8. Own (7)
 - 10. Weather (8)
 - 11. Equitable (4)
 - 13. Evil-doer (6)
 - 15. Disallow (6)
 - 17. Deserve (4)
 - 18. Investigation (8)
 - 21. Labour (7)
 - 22. Italian city dweller (5)
 - 23. Annoyance (10)
- Down**
- 1. Inscribe (5)
 - 2. Tied up (8)
 - 3. Fame (6)
 - 4. Ascend (4)
 - 5. Work (7)
 - 6. Valuation (10)
 - 9. Extending (10)
 - 12. Practise (8)
 - 14. Recount (7)
 - 16. Pill (6)
 - 19. Send (5)
 - 20. Wan (4)

SOLUTION -
see page 47

The Catholic Universe Sudoku

No. 287

Every Sudoku has a
unique solution that
can be reached
logically. Enter
numbers into the
blank spaces so t
hat each row,
column and 3x3
box contains the
numbers 1 to 9.

Stuck?
see page 47



Classified/Crossword/Liturgical Calendars

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For the Promotion of the Traditional Roman Rite

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Crossword Solution (from p46)

Across: 1 Waterproof; 7 Swift; 8 Possess; 10 Elements; 11 Fair; 13 Sinner; 15 Reject; 17 Earn; 18 Research; 21 Travail; 22 Roman; 23 Resentment.

Down: 1 Write; 2 Tethered; 3 Repute; 4 Rise; 5 Operate; 6 Assessment; 9 Stretching; 12 Rehearse; 14 Narrate; 16 Pellet; 19 Remit; 20 Pale.

MASS TIMES

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SATURDAY: 8am; 6pm (Saturday Vigil)
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Sudoku Solution (from p46)

6	1	7	3	8	9	4	5	2
5	4	9	2	7	1	6	8	3
8	3	2	5	6	4	1	9	7
9	2	4	6	5	3	8	7	1
1	8	5	4	2	7	9	3	6
3	7	6	1	9	8	2	4	5
4	5	8	7	1	2	3	6	9
2	6	3	9	4	5	7	1	8
7	9	1	8	3	6	5	2	4

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LITURGICAL CALENDARS

Ordinary Form Liturgical Calendar
Sunday Year B, weekday cycle 1

March: Month of St Joseph Third Sunday of Lent, Sunday 7th March: Ex 20:1-17; Ps 18; 1Cor 1:22-25; Jn 2:13-25	Wednesday, 10th March: Dt 4:1,5-9; Ps 147; Mt 5:17-19
Monday, 8th March: 2Kgs 5:1-15; Ps 41; Lk 4:24-30	Thursday, 11th March: Jer 7:23-28; Ps 94; Lk 11:14-23
Tuesday, 9th March: Dn 3:25,34-43; Ps 24; Mt 18:21-35	Friday, 12th March: Hos 14:2-10; Ps 80; Mk 12:28-34
	Saturday, 13th March: Hos 5:15-6:6; Ps 50; Lk 18:9-14

Roman Missal of 1962 (Tridentine Rite)
Extraordinary Form Calendar according to the

Sunday, 7th March: Third Sunday in Lent, Eph 5:1-9; Lk 11:14-28	Thursday, 11th March: Feria Ecclus 45:1-6; Mt 1:18-2
Monday, 8th March: Feria 4 Kgs 4:1-15; Lk 4:23-30	Friday, 12th March: Feria Num 20:1,3,6-13; Jn 4:5-42
Tuesday, 9th March: Feria 4 Kgs 4:1-7; Mt 18:15-22	Saturday, 13th March: Feria Dan 13:1-9,15-17,19-30,33-62; Jn 8:1-11
Wednesday, 10th March: Feria Ex 20:12-24; Mt 15:1-20	Compiled by Gordon Dimon, Senior MC of the Latin Mass Society

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12 page Catholic Times supplement

Roles and responsibilities in sport

Mgr Vladimir Felzmann

Trying to control Covid, the Government has constantly encouraged its citizens to act responsibly. Many people said this lacked clarity. What did it mean? Radio conversations tried to clarify. It meant thinking about the consequences – the outcomes – of your actions. Boris and his boys made it clear that it was our duty and liability to avoid irresponsible reckless behaviour. We were encouraged to engage our brain before going out. Charity may begin – but does not end – at home. Or, to put it another way, the whole of the planet is our home.

Although each of us plays an important role in maintaining our own health – by watching our diet, exercise and sleep – we are not the only ones to be held responsible. Society and thus the Government should help to promote health and prevent disease by better targeted health education as well as improving the environment and sport facilities.

As sport is a metaphor for life – and can teach us much – let's take a look at the professional level. Great sports coaches and managers help athletes to improve not only their performances on the pitch, track or field, but to develop their full human-potential. Once athletes realise they are appreciated and cared for as human beings, they are more likely to respond by giving of their best for the sake of their boss.

Coaches and managers know that their owners and fans deem them responsible for the performances of



their teams. They know that they need to be prepared and expect the same of their team; they know they need to adjust their style to each of their team member's needs. What works for one person could be detrimental to another. They figure out the best approach for each by watching their players in action. They choose encouragement over criticism; but when they must criticise, give feedback as soon after the match as possible. They know they need to be honest yet compassionate, when sorting out issues. Then move on. They need to have high expectations. And believe in their team. Rather than ignoring or sidelining under-performers, they help them improve. They know that their team is only as good as the weakest member. So they set clear goals and milestones, and celebrate when these are hit.

The team playing on the field gets credit if it succeeds, but the hard work put in by the back-room team often goes unnoticed. These unsung

heroes – the assistant manager, the coaches, opposition analysts, fitness and conditioning coaches, nutritionists, physiotherapists, masseurs, scouts, youth team coaches and even kit managers – together shape a team and its performance. Over the years, the role of a football manager has changed.

Managers are currently responsible for running and functioning of the team. They have the autonomy to choose the supporting staff. They also manage player's contracts and can add – or ask the owners – to add more players if required.

A football manager has different responsibilities pre-season, during the season and post-season. This is why they are so important for their team.

In the pre-season phase, they take care of following responsibilities: they formulate and co-ordinate operational plans for the team; prepare contracts of the players and coaches and assure the execution of the contracts; handle the budgeting duties and allocate the budget adequately; appoint personnel and other team staff for smooth functioning; assist in sponsorships and endorsements; look into ticket sales and merchandise.

During the game-season, the following responsibilities come in play: Co-ordinate delivery of the operational plan, liaise between players, coaches, club executives and general committee, ensure availability of the equipment and they are in good working condition, prepare running sheets and match reports

for all the matches and ensure players attending a tribunal hearing are supported by good advocates.

After the match, the manager acts as a spokesperson for the team and handles the press. While the players and the coaches get to rest between matches and gear themselves for the next match, the manager and his team don't get time to rest. They are constantly on the move preparing for one match after another.

It seems to me that sport mirrors the three stages of parenthood: before, during and after their children leave school. Worth a thought?

Randy Duane Couture, an American actor, former US Army sergeant, retired mixed martial artist and former collegiate and Greco-Roman wrestler, made it clear that martial arts breed a stronger level of responsibility compared to traditional team sports. "It breeds a particular integrity where you have to take responsibility for yourself...In a team sport it's easy to say: 'Well the team didn't play well today'. That doesn't really fly. You have to take responsibility and accountability for yourself and step up and evaluate whether you're giving it everything you can give it."

"I have always tried to be true to myself, to pick those battles I felt were important. My ultimate responsibility is to myself. I could never be anything else," said Arthur Ashe, the first black player selected to the United States Davis Cup team and the only black man ever to win the singles title at Wimbledon, the US Open, and the Australian Open.

He retired in 1980.

"At 17, I already had responsibility because I took care of my family, but in the football I was young. I wasn't experienced or the captain. I was just in the team." Admitted Edson Arantes do Nascimento, known as Pelé, a Brazilian former professional footballer, now aged 80 and regarded as one of the greatest players of all time. He was among the most successful and popular sports figures of the 20th century.

"It's the one thing you can control. You are responsible for how people remember you – or don't. So, don't take it lightly." Wise words from Kobe Bryant. Known to be one of the greatest basketball players of all time, he often went by his self-given nickname "Black Mamba" on the court, which, to him, reminded him of who he wanted to be when he stepped into each game. In a 2015 interview with Ahmad Rashad, Bryant explained: "When I step on that court, I become Black Mamba. I am that killer snake. I'm stone cold, man."

Sadly, on the morning of January 26th, 2020, Kobe Bryant, along with his 13-year-old daughter Gianna (Gigi) and seven other victims, lost their lives in a helicopter crash in Calabasas, California.



Retired NBA legend Kobe Bryant, who was Catholic, is pictured on 17th January 2020. (CNS photo/Harrison Hill-e-USA TODAY Sports via Reuters)

Life has taught me that there are seven 'Be-Responsibilities' if you wish to build a winning team – including a family:

- Be caring.
- Be committed.
- Be communicative.
- Be a coach.
- Be consistent.
- Be energetically contagious.
- Be a positive role-model.

Why not ask your children – and your friends and allies-in-life what they think? How many marks out of ten would they give you? Lent is a good time to tweak your virtues.

In a fortnight we shall explore the theme of 'loyalty'.



Young athletes in Kenya run during a training session in a field in the town of Iten. Irish Patrician Brother Colm O'Connell (inset) has been turning youths like these into Olympic and world champions. (Catholic News Service photo/Fredrick Nzili)